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Under Equality's Sun

George Mackay Brown and Socialism from the Margins
of Society

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Abstract

This thesis aims to urge consideration of George Mackay Brown (1921-96) as a writer of deeper political concern(s) than previously thought. Though Brown's writing for local Orkney newspapers spans his entire literary career, critical appreciations of his journalism have tended to be shallow in investigation and narrow in terms of focus.

After considering the political context in which Brown was raised, this thesis will then seek to enhance our understanding of Brown's journalism and his political awareness by focusing on early articles that, this study contends, have not received sufficient attention in either biography or criticism. In broadening our understanding of this area, this study will regularly refer to articles that have not been extensively considered since their original publication during the infancy of Brown's writing career - the articles selected are generally representative of Brown's writing at the time, giving the reader a wide knowledge of the concerns and style of his early journalism.

Once the terrain of Brown's political leanings has been mapped out, this study will then explore how elements of Brown's political attitudes translate to his creative work, predominantly through close reading of selected short stories. Having first of all examined Brown's politics at an early stage of his career through his journalism, and then studied how this can be found within his creative work, this thesis will ultimately propose a new angle of consideration of his work: that Brown, while a writer of wide and varied concern, is a writer who can (and should) be considered within a political context.

Abbreviations

Texts and Publications

FI – For the Islands I Sing

ID – Island Diary

LfH – Letters from Hamnavoe

OH – Orkney Herald

OT – An Orkney Tapestry

TK – A Time to Keep

UBB – Under Brinkie's Brae

WR – The Whaler's Return

‘Under Equality’s Sun’¹: George Mackay Brown and Socialism from the Margins of Society

Introduction

George Mackay Brown (1921-96) is a writer who, through his range and skill, refuses to be pigeonholed. He is a Scottish author, an Orcadian bard, a Catholic writer, a historical novelist and is now regarded as one of the most unique fictional voices of the twentieth century. Rightly, he has been seriously considered in all of these terms by academics and critics alike. In the first major academic study of Brown in 1978, Alan Bold stated that

It is impossible to place George Mackay Brown. [...] His work, not being determined by the dictates of a critical theory, has neither the gimmickry of modernism nor the quasi-photographic fidelity of documentary realism. In other words, he is something of a law unto himself: a man activated by a wide artistic vision.²

Essentially, Bold does not qualify the difficulty in terms of categorizing Brown as a problem. He recognises that limiting him to a narrow literary field will not enhance our understanding of Brown and that we should aim to open up new alleys of exploration of Brown’s work rather than force him down a single track. Recently, Brown criticism has concentrated most often on his religion, most notably with Linden Bicket’s 2017 scholarly study *George Mackay Brown and the Scottish Catholic Imagination* and Ron Ferguson’s more popular work on Brown’s spiritual journey in *George Mackay Brown: The Wound and the Gift* (2011). These publications have been essential in colouring the grey areas of Brown’s spiritual journey and, particularly in the case of Bicket’s study, how this translates to his writing.

It is crucial that our studies of Brown encourage further opportunities to explore lesser-known areas of his writing. However, we ought to be careful not to allow one

¹ George Mackay Brown, ‘Hamnavoe’ from *The Collected Poems of George Mackay Brown* ed. By Archie Bevan and Brian Murray (London: John Murray, 2005) p.25.

² Alan Bold, *George Mackay Brown* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1978) p.1.

reading to dominate critical examination of Brown's work. For example, there is a risk that the emphasis that has been placed on Brown's religion will result in him being purely considered in this religious context. For example, Alison Gray's recent *George Mackay Brown: No Separation* (2016) claims to document

the Catholicism of George Mackay Brown that hitherto has remained quiet, unexplored and not greatly understood. Not a Catholic or religious writer as such, but treating all the subjects of literature as a Catholic would treat them, and only could treat them.³

Evidently, there is a danger that the Catholicism that is so pivotal to Brown's writing is beginning to obscure other ways in which he should be considered - this study will share more common ground with Alan Bold's assertion that Brown cannot be categorized. Rather than believing that he treats 'all' subjects in a certain way or that his religion brings any kind of exclusivity to his writing, this study will not claim Brown for a literary tribe but will offer new ways in which he can be considered.

In addition to the work of Bicket, Ferguson and a prize-winning biography of Brown by Maggie Fergusson, there have been other recent illuminating publications on Brown. In his 2009 academic study *George Mackay Brown and the Philosophy of Community*, Timothy Baker recognises that 'Brown's work is seen as representing a peripheral vision in which the larger concerns of world history, and the complexities of lived experience, are elided in favour of an atemporal, myth-centered perspective.'⁴ Baker does not fully subscribe to this outlook, rather claiming that 'Brown's writings of Orkney should not be read as anthro – or mythic – historic observation, but must be understood as attempts to understand the central problems of modernity.'⁵ In doing so, Baker recognises that the complexities of the idea of community are central to Brown's fiction:

the tension between the world as it desired and the world as it is forms the core of his [Brown's] works, and in that light Brown must

³ Alison Gray, *George Mackay Brown: No Separation* (London: Gracewing Publishing, 2016) p.x.

⁴ Timothy C. Baker, *George Mackay Brown and the Philosophy of Community* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2009) p.3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.5.

be seen as engaging with both the themes and aesthetic possibilities of contemporary fiction in order to document the failings and difficulties of the modern world.⁶

This study will look to build on this interpretation by examining the nature and origins of the ‘failings and difficulties of the modern world’ as Brown expresses them in his early journalism and a selection of his shorter fiction. In complementing the assertion that Brown deals with the problems of contemporary life, however, this study will also challenge Baker’s assertion that ‘Brown situates himself outside of [...] modern politics.’⁷ This thesis ventures to suggest that Brown is, rather, acutely aware of politics as the builder of social structures, and that it is this which often creates tension in his work, and shows the ‘failings and difficulties of the modern world.’ Evaluation of the nature of Brown’s politics and consideration of how his views of the difficulties of the modern world translate to his literary world will enable us to consider Brown as a writer of political concern.

Within Brown criticism, certain patterns have emerged that may have prevented this consideration. In his 1995 study *The Making of Orcadia: Narrative Identity in the Prose Work of George Mackay Brown*, Berthold Schoene states that ‘the allegation that Brown is a conservative and anti-progressive writer, spearheading a neo-Kailyard strand in modern Scottish literature is a major academic cliché which has marred Brown’s reputation as a serious contemporary writer.’⁸ This study will contest this ‘allegation’ that Schoene refers to; an investigation of Brown’s early, often directly political, journalism, challenges this view and reveals that he is neither ‘conservative’ nor ‘anti-progressive.’

In addition to some restrictive parameters of debate regarding Brown’s work, criticism on Scottish literature and politics in the twentieth century can also be seen to be prohibitive regarding inclusion of Brown as a writer of political concern. Recently, there has perhaps been a tendency for focus to land on writers’ engagements with the politics of devolution or Scottish independence. While these are central pillars of

⁶ Ibid., p.4.

⁷ Ibid., p.1.

⁸ Berthold Schoene, *The Making of Orcadia: Narrative Identity in the Prose Work of George Mackay Brown* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Publishing 1995) p.68.

political debate, particularly regarding the latter half of twentieth-century Scotland, this has sometimes been to the detriment of consideration of writers of political concern rather than political cause. Douglas Gifford notes that ‘the Renaissance movement of MacDiarmid and Gunn, for all the scale and richness of its literary achievement, found no echo in terms of parliamentary representation.’⁹ Considering this alongside the fact that from 1945 until 2015, the Labour Party received more votes in Scotland than any other single party in each respective UK General Election, one wonders if due attention has been paid to writers whose concern was with those members of society that the Labour Party were often supported by.

The nucleus of this study will be drawn from research of the private archive of Brian Murray.¹⁰ Murray’s archive encapsulates a huge range of Brown’s writing; both published and unpublished, including a large collection of Brown’s writings for local Orkney newspapers. This element of the collection, a rare resource in Brown studies, identifies a thread that runs throughout Brown’s career, from his early days as a discontented man to his later years as a successful writer, through his struggles with depression to his bouts of Tuberculosis and his lashings out at Calvinism to his embracement of Catholicism. Local newspaper articles are almost ever-present throughout Brown’s career but they have, to date, received little critical evaluation.

Clearly, Orkney newspapers were pivotal to Brown’s career. He wrote for a number of them, in a variety of forms and with rare abstinence, from August 1944 right up until days before his death in 1996. The Second World War had left a dearth of jobseekers in Orkney and Brown capitalized on this and was appointed despite few qualifications.¹¹ He was originally hired by the *OH* as ‘Western Correspondent’ and

⁹ Douglas Gifford, ‘Re-mapping Renaissance’ in *Beyond Scotland: New Contexts for Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature* ed. By Gerard Carruthers, David Goldie and Alastair Renfrew (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004) p.27.

¹⁰ Brian Murray has endorsed the research undertaken for this thesis and has kindly permitted access to his private archive to facilitate it.

¹¹ James Twatt was the sole proprietor of the *OH* who hired Brown, and they worked closely together. Following Twatt’s death in 1951 at the age of 71, the newspaper stated that ‘the war years, when he [Twatt] had to carry on the business with a greatly depleted staff and attend to an increasing volume of work undoubtedly placed a heavy strain on him, and caused the gradual decline in health which he had suffered since.’

was predominantly responsible for covering west Mainland Orkney. Later, Brown would essentially become a columnist for the *Orcadian* newspaper, and many of his articles from this time have been collected and published.

These published collections comprise four volumes: *LfH* (1975), *UBB* (1979), *Rockpools and Daffodils* (1992) and *The First Wash of Spring* (2006).

Chronologically, the first collected article in these publications, 'The First Letter', was published on the 18th of February 1971; the final article from *The First Wash of Spring* is dated the 11th of December 1996, more than twenty years after 'The First Letter'. Sitting between these two dates, this published body of work ignores Brown's early journalism entirely, thus significantly limiting our critical view of his development as a writer.

Access to Murray's archive has given insight to the ignored early journalism. These early articles are often contrasting in terms of tone and content from the later, collected articles. Though these later articles often give us interesting insights into Brown's thoughts at that stage of his life, we also see a private, placid Brown cover dry, and at times bland, topics. Across the four collections, titles of articles include 'Good Weather'¹², 'Ballpoint Pens'¹³, 'Getting to Know your Toaster'¹⁴ and 'The End of a Toaster.'¹⁵ These articles are the musings of an esteemed local writer who has a reputation to protect. Perhaps because of this, Brown generally avoids substantial issues, as he notes in his introduction to *LfH*:

Those who look to have 'real issues' discussed – like oil, fishing, tourism, agriculture – will find nothing to get their teeth into. There is little about politics or religion either – these attract hosts of 'Letters to the Editor', and I have neither the energy nor the desire to take part in such barren scuffles.¹⁶

Anon, 'The Late Mr James Twatt', *OH*, 26th June 1951, p.1.

¹² George Mackay Brown, *LfH* (London: Savage, 2002) p.28.

¹³ George Mackay Brown, *UBB* (London: Savage, 2003) p.23.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.143.

¹⁵ George Mackay Brown, *Rockpools and Daffodils* (Edinburgh: Gordon Wright Publishing, 1992) p.166.

¹⁶ Brown, *LfH*, p.8.

The early articles that this study documents, however, reflect a time when Brown did have both the energy and the desire to indulge in scuffles over issues of social and political concern. In this early journalism Brown writes in a more combative way than in this later work, and he displays much keener political persuasions than previously thought.

Chapter One of this study will make a general evaluation of Brown's background and how this may have informed his political sensitivities. In order to effectively discuss the opinions that Brown outlines in his journalism, a degree of contextual knowledge regarding Brown himself, and the Orcadian backdrop in which these articles were written, is essential. Following this, Chapter Two will investigate the political opinions that Brown articulates in the early stages of his career through analysis of three case studies, complemented with references to a wider range of articles.

The articles discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis are centered round the British General Election of 1945. The first two articles were published in the *OH* in the run-up to the election and the final article was published in the aftermath. This is important in giving us a view of what Brown's political opinions were and, crucially, what he wanted to use those opinions for. When considering these articles holistically, we will see a writer who is not simply offering his political opinion, but one who is using his platform as a writer to actively persuade people to vote a certain way. At the time of writing these articles, Brown is not a passive political commentator, but an active voice, making bold and brave comments.

Chapter Three will further extend our understanding of Brown's journalism, and consider the progression of the ideas outlined in Chapter Two in the period shortly after 1945. As well as this, Chapter Three will, at times, move away from a focus on content to place emphasis on the tone of Brown's writing. In doing so, Chapter Three aims to inform not only on Brown's political ideas in the infancy of his career, but consider how these opinions had grown (and how Brown had matured) before he departed Orkney for Newbattle in the summer of 1951.

After deducing the nature of Brown's political opinions, this study will then examine how these ideas manifest themselves in Brown's creative writing, predominantly his

short stories. While referencing a range of Brown's stories, Chapter Four will predominantly include close readings of 'Tithonus' (1974), 'WR' (1969) and 'TK' (1969), illustrating how the political thoughts of Brown that are outlined in previous chapters correspond with elements of his fiction. Firstly, however, in order to fully comprehend what Brown's opinions were, it is essential to look at how the seeds of his world-view were planted.

Chapter One - 'Grief by the Shrouded Nets'¹⁷: George Mackay Brown's Orcadian, British and Universal Background

While acknowledging the worth of recent biographical studies on Brown, Linden Bicket states that 'a number of Brown's writings which display little known aspects of his faith and its connection to his literary craft remain to be explored.'¹⁸ Bicket then goes on to insightfully discuss how varying components of Brown's life presents us, in turn, with a deeper understanding of 'Brown's literary Catholicism.'¹⁹ Though it is inadvisable to read one's life as a direct correspondence to their literary output, it is worth sensitively considering how Brown's upbringing, and his surroundings, contributed towards the political opinions he so deeply expresses, and that this study will later discuss. Bicket asserts that recent biographical studies of Brown 'deal with his personal relationships, struggles with alcohol and depression, and influence on other religious people.'²⁰ A noteworthy absence is Brown's politics; an element of his life that this study contends has been underplayed. This chapter aims to go some way in filling this gap.

In his 2010 study *The History of Orkney Literature*, Simon Hall states that 'literature is of primary significance to local sub-national or national identity in all of the former Norse colonies of the North Atlantic. [...] the feeling that literature is very much what people do [...] is key to traditional art in the North.'²¹ It follows, then, that Orcadian literature, like that of Brown, tells us something of its people. With this in mind, consideration of Brown, and the Orcadian context in which he was raised, should add insight to the political ideas that he later expresses.

Treatment of Brown as an Orcadian (and Orcadians as Brown) has, at times, restricted appreciation of Brown's thematic range, and perhaps takes root in a marginalization

¹⁷ Brown, 'Hamnavoe', p.24.

¹⁸ Linden Bicket, *George Mackay Brown and the Scottish Catholic Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017) p.47.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Simon Hall, *The History of Orkney Literature* (Edinburgh: Birlinn 2010) p.3.

of remote regions and, consequently, their culture.²² In her consideration of Brown's Orkney background, Sabine Schmid has asserted that

The geographic location and representation of Scotland's north and Northern Isles have invited many people to regard such remote places and geographic margins as cultural peripheries whose marginal ranking classes them as inferior.²³

Alan McGillivray also considers the geographical isolation that Brown enjoyed. He wrote of the issues that this separation creates that, he appears to believe may be two-fold: that Orcadians may tend to become culturally marginalized, and that they may, in turn, develop insular tendencies - he states that Orkney inhabitants

may come to develop their own particular local consciousness, even a kind of 'nationalism'; this can be a source of strength at its best, providing a solidarity and mutual supportiveness that can see the islanders through many a local crisis. At its worst, however, it may lead to a dangerous tendency to ignore what the outside world is doing, leading to weakness and unpreparedness in the face of a determined threat from a powerful outside source.²⁴

Study of the lives of Orcadians proves that this assertion is problematic. Firstly, if something is affected by an outside source, to what extent is that source still considered an 'outside source'? The source may originate elsewhere, but Brown inhabited a world where societies were 'affected more and more extensively and more and more deeply by events of other societies.'²⁵ From the price of Cheviot Sheep to the price of oil, regions of Scotland, from Shetland to Stranraer, have been affected by decisions and circumstances elsewhere. Secondly, a brief evaluation of the context of

²² Douglas Gifford proposed that 'his [Brown's] case is the sad one of a truly great writer who has chosen to live in a room with only one view from a single window'.

Douglas Gifford, "Modern Scottish Fiction," *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 13:1 (1978) p.259.

²³ Sabine Schmid, *Keeping the Sources Pure: The Making of George Mackay Brown* (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2003) p.20.

²⁴ Alan McGillivray, *George Mackay Brown's Greenvoe* (Kilmarnock: ASLS, 1989) p.1.

²⁵ Steve Smith, Patricia Owens and John Bayliss, *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) p.9.

Brown's life shows that it is impossible for Orcadians to 'ignore what the outside world is doing'. One could argue from the Vikings to oil, Orkney's history has brought it into the world rather than set it apart. Treatment of Brown and Orkney as separate from Great Britain and the modern world has been limiting: consideration of Brown's life and works in a wider context will enable us to fully appreciate the level of his political consciousness.

Brown's family history underlines the inter-connected nature of Orkney. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, John Brown (1875-1940), George Mackay Brown's father, embarked on an apprenticeship as a tailor. At the time, Stromness tailors benefitted hugely from providing for the many Orcadians who worked in the Canadian bases of the Hudson's Bay Company. The links between the Hudson's Bay Company and Orkney (particularly Stromness) were strong and well-established: the company employed Orcadians from around 1702. The strength of this link continued to grow and 'by the 1790s, Orcadians comprised three-quarters of the employees of the Company in Canada, the majority being manual workers.'²⁶ John Brown's father had worked as a cobbler and it is likely that his employment opportunities were also heavily boosted, indirectly, by this link.

However, some Orcadians contested the impact that the Hudson's Bay Company was having on the Orkney community. Despite offering young men an (often lucrative)²⁷ opportunity of employment, it was argued that the temporary riches offered by the company seduced young men and that brain drain was the likely long-term affect. In a broader sense, some worried that the Hudson's Bay Company spearheaded change that threatened the very structure of society itself:

²⁶ Alexander Fenton, *The Northern Isles: Orkney and Shetland* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1997) p.596.

²⁷ During a time when a farm servant would earn approximately £2.10 shillings per annum, a labourer with the Hudson's Bay Company would earn between £6 and £18 per year depending on service: in his extensive study *The New History of Orkney* (2008), William Thomson states that 'the attractions of a few years service in Canada were obvious.'
William P.L. Thomson, *The New History of Orkney* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2008) p.372.

Ministers and lairds had an uneasy feeling that the natural order of society was under threat. For most of the eighteenth century social control had been firmly in their hands, and indeed their combined power had been increasing rather than diminishing as estates grew bigger and ministers came increasingly to identify with the interests of the landowner.²⁸

Despite the dissenting voices, the economic benefits that the Hudson's Bay Company brought to Orkney were, for a while, plentiful and undeniable. Shops in Stromness benefitted from the pay packets brought home by whalers and by the frequent stops from ships in search of supplies. However, as cities south of Orkney were beginning to be shaped by the Industrial Revolution, the ripple effect of the growing number of factories on the mainland reached the shores of Orkney. Not long after John Brown had served his apprenticeship, city factories began to supply the Hudson's Bay Company with cheaper clothing. Businesses in Orkney were susceptible to the national pattern where 'mass production at centralized workplaces competitively displaced outwork, which went into decline in most trades in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.'²⁹ John Brown's hours were soon dramatically cut. He tried to make up for the loss of income with a variety of odd-jobs: delivering laundry for a Kirkwall-based company and working as a postman in Stromness. However, this signaled a life-long financial struggle for John Brown and, consequently, his family.

George Mackay Brown's mother, Mhairi Mackay (1891-1967), was born in a hamlet in Sutherland in 1891. She left mainland Scotland for Stromness at the age of sixteen, one of generations of Mackays who had been forced to leave their homeland in search of a better life elsewhere. Brown stated that

it is likely that her near Mackay ancestors had had to endure the 'clearances' of the early nineteenth century, when whole communities of Gaelic-speaking Highlanders were persuaded or driven out of the valleys where they had lived, a poor but free community under the chiefs of Mackay, for many centuries.³⁰

²⁸ Thomson, p.376.

²⁹ Wally Seccombe, *Weathering the Storm: Working-Class Families from the Industrial Revolution to the Fertility Decline* (London: Verso Books, 1995) p.24.

³⁰ George Mackay Brown, *FI* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2008) p.9.

He was right. Mhairi's ancestors hailed from Strathnaver, and her grand-father, Angus Mackay, 'passed down his own grandfather's description of leaving his home in flames.'³¹ Though the Highland Clearances were wide in reach and impact across the region, the county of Sutherland bore a particular brunt - Strathnaver³² was utterly decimated during the Highland Clearances, and ruthlessly targeted in a campaign in which the aim of the authorities was to 'clear the cottages of their inmates, giving them about half an hour to pack up stuff and carry off their furniture...[prior to setting] the cottages on fire.'³³ In one month alone 'well over 200 families - comprising nearly 1300 men, women and children - were driven from their homes in Strathnaver in May 1819.'³⁴ It is likely that Angus Mackay and his family were among these forced displacements.

Though in less violent circumstances, Mhairi Mackay also left her home in search of a better life. Fortunately for her, she had a distant relative who was a hotel proprietor: John Mackay had recently added the Stromness Hotel to his portfolio and offered her employment as a chambermaid. Despite not having been to the nearby Orkney Islands before, Mhairi Mackay accepted the job and set sail for Stromness, where she soon met John Brown. They married in 1910.

³¹ Maggie Fergusson, *George Mackay Brown: The Life* (London: John Murray Publishers, 2006) p.4.

³² Strathnaver comprises one of the main elements of the narrative of John McGrath's *The Cheviot, The Stag and the Black, Black Oil* (1973), which Brown attended when it visited Orkney and wrote about in his weekly column for *The Orcadian*. Brown described the play as 'a fascinating patchwork with one clear theme - the tragic history of the Highlands, with emptying glens and a broken culture.' Brown then went on to state that the play's themes 'ought to mean something to all Orcadians. For we too had our clearances, and we are going to have oil, and the whole pattern of our life is going to be changed.' Before summarizing that he was 'very glad' to have seen the play, Brown, recognised the importance of art in crystalizing current political debate, bemoaning how small the Orcadian audiences for the play were, and stating that 'the immediate situation before Orkney would have been much clearer, in the communal mind, if a thousand or so folk had been compelled to go and see *The Cheviot, The Stag and the Black, Black Oil*.'

George Mackay Brown, 'The 7:84 Theatre Company' in *LfH*, p.118.

³³ James Hunter, *Set Adrift Upon The World: The Sutherland Clearances* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2016) p.356.

³⁴ Ibid.

Children soon followed with George Brown, the youngest of six, born in 1921.³⁵ Despite their increased list of dependents, John and Mhairi Brown were not just devoid of job security but also housing security. Following their marriage, the Browns rented a house on Victoria Street in Stromness where, despite the regular struggle to pay the rent, they were timely with their payments and the house was generally a happy place that was filled with stories and song. However, in 1928 the Browns were to receive a hammer blow. For reasons that forever remained unknown to the Brown family, their landlady vindictively decided that they must vacate the property. Though they did not go far (they moved a few hundred yards down the road) this was a huge setback for them: the house that the children were comfortable in was to become a foreign land and this disappointment was felt acutely across the family - 'George remembered the anguish he felt at seeing his mother, for the first time, in tears.'³⁶ Aside from the practical implications, this was an untimely and unwelcome reminder for Brown's parents: there was a social order, and they were near the bottom of it. Like her ancestors before her, Mhairi Mackay was vulnerable to the largely unregulated wishes of landlords. Neither Mhairi's eviction in Stromness nor her family's expulsion in the Highlands represents circumstances particular to a person or place: 'Highland landlords were neither uniquely avaricious nor unusually neglectful in comparison with landlords elsewhere.'³⁷ Brown's family history serves to underline the inter-connected nature of Orkney and the common challenges that working people faced, be it from employers or landlords.

This economic context of Brown's family is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, the circumstances defined the economic position and social status of the Brown family for years to come. Consequently, Brown develops his early frustrations with 'progress':

³⁵ Ruby Brown, born in 1911, was the eldest child of the Brown family and the only girl. Hugh (1913), Jackie (1914), Harold (1917) and Richard (1919) followed before George. Ruby, who was regularly responsible for looking after her youngest brother George, had a profound effect on him - he later recalled her 'gift for story-telling' and was enchanted by her verbal use of this 'gift'. Maggie Fergusson, *The Life*, p.8.

³⁶ Fergusson, *The Life*, p.23.

³⁷ Eric Richards, *Debating the Highland Clearances* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007) p.85.

I was the last child of a poor family. My father, John Brown, was a tailor: but the same ‘progress’ that had taken the wind out of sailing ships had hurt the tailors’ trade. Suits were ready-made by machines in the cities of the south.³⁸

Brown also links ‘progress’ to the life of his mother, while considering her ancestry and the enduring impact that it had on her life:

It was progress, that religion of nineteenth-century man – that irresistible force – that destroyed and uprooted everything that seemed to stand in its way. Nothing was sacred or beautiful; only money and profits counted. The ancient way of life of the Scottish Gaels was destroyed with ferocity.³⁹

Clearly, Brown identifies ‘progress’ as the root of many of the hardships that his parents had to endure. His views towards ‘progress’ are well-established – Brown himself stated that progress ‘is in great part a delusion, and will peter out in the marsh’⁴⁰ and Linden Bicket has noted that his ‘frequent railing against [...] progress may lead his reader to the conclusion that he is a deeply conservative writer.’⁴¹ Maggie Ferguson wrote of Brown’s ‘ID’ columns that

Again and again, he warmed to the same recalcitrant theme, resisting almost every initiative on the part of the island authorities, urging his readers to recognise that, by pinning their hopes on prosperity and progress, they were building a future on quicksand.⁴²

However, in order to develop a broad understanding of Brown’s opinions towards progress, then our consideration of the term ‘progress’ must be vast. For Ron Ferguson, Brown’s ‘complaint against what passes for progress stems from a spiritual understanding that sees an uncritical view of modern technology’s bounty as dangerous to the world.’⁴³ In a slightly different vein, Berthold Scheone argues that ‘it is the alienating kind of progress that is ‘concerned only with material things in the

³⁸ Brown, *FI*, p.9.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ George Mackay Brown, *OT*, (London: Quarter Books, 1973) p.21.

⁴¹ Bicket, *Catholic Imagination*. P.34.

⁴² Fergusson, *The Life*, p.74.

⁴³ Ferguson, *George Mackay Brown: The Wound and the Gift* (Edinburgh: St. Andrews Press, 2011) p.249.

present and in a vague golden-handed future” which he [Brown] criticizes as a “rootless utilitarian faith.”⁴⁴ This focus on the material element of ‘progress’ is extended by Iain Crichton Smith who, despite an admiring evaluation of Brown and his work, wrote that ‘he was a pure artist and this view of him is only disturbed by his awkward references to war and the corrupt world of the machine which probably helped him to survive when he was in hospital.’⁴⁵ Evidently, there has been a tendency so far for readers to, at times, take a narrow view of Brown’s ‘progress’: some focus on the spiritual, others on the technological and some on the more all-encompassing impact on society that ‘progress’ will have. I contend that Brown, in his meaning of ‘progress’, marries moral, technological and social elements, and that it is simplistic to state that any of these three are mutually exclusive or more prominent. For example, through the circumstances of Brown’s father’s job as a tailor, we see elements of all three key ingredients: the moral compasses of company owners enabled decisions to be made without due consideration of the workforce; the rise of technology enabled factories to work more efficiently; as a result of this, a social order was established. We also see differing amounts of the three key elements of this so-called ‘progress’ abused through Mhairi Mackay’s ancestry, John Brown’s financial struggles and the Brown family’s fight for settled accommodation. Such injustices are often the focal point for Brown’s writing.

There is one constant loser in this advance of ‘progress’: the working man. Brown acknowledges the inter-connected nature of ‘progress’ and depicts how it will adversely affect those who need the most support. Neil Gunn also identified with the elements of progress and the dangers that they brought to (particularly rural) communities - ‘the great Gaelic heroes worked about croft and creek, hunted hill and glen, exactly like – and with – their neighbours. As a way of life it was logical and effective. And with so little on the plane of material riches (i.e. without the aid of machines), what a large spiritual life was there!’⁴⁶ Brown, like Gunn, believed that reliance on technology would erode our reliance on each other and, subsequently, our communities. Hence, Brown is not simply against ‘progress’; he is against ‘progress’

⁴⁴ Berthold Schoene, *The Making of Orcadia*, p.67.

⁴⁵ Iain Crichton Smith, *Murdo: The Life and Works* (Edinburgh: Birlinn 2001) p.247.

⁴⁶ Neil Gunn, *Belief in Ourselves* (Dunbeath: Whittles Publishing, 2010) p.47.

as a contributor towards an unfair society that is preoccupied with advancing the lives of a select few.

As well as Neil Gunn, Edwin Muir also acknowledged the necessity of co-operation in rural Scottish life. George Marshall documents that Muir believed that ‘among the Orkney peasants an awareness of mutual dependence arose from the practical need to share skills and effort and from the realization of shared hardships.’⁴⁷ It was this level of co-operation that Muir felt was a safety-blanket to his early life in Orkney. When all social responsibility is substituted for personal economic profit, the blanket is swiped away and life becomes even more challenging. Muir’s family, similarly to Brown’s, suffered due to ever-increasing rent prices when ‘high rental demanded by an ‘improving’ landlord drove them [...] to a less good farm on Wyre, then to a poor farm on Mainland island.’⁴⁸ After failing on their farm in Mainland Orkney, the Muir family was forced to find work in Glasgow as the industrial revolution began to boom. Both Muir’s and Brown’s childhoods were partly shaped by the demands of landlords.⁴⁹ Perhaps inspired by these early struggles, much of Muir’s writing, both fiction and non-fiction, encourages the upholding of co-operation amongst society, a principal to which Brown also adheres.⁵⁰

After moving to a new house, the Brown family struggled on. However, Brown knew that it was not just his family who failed to benefit from the economic growth of Stromness:

⁴⁷ George Marshall, *In a Distant Isle: The Orkney Background of Edwin Muir* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987) p.92.

⁴⁸ Margery McCulloch, *Edwin Muir: Poet, Critic and Novelist* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993) p.x.

⁴⁹ Edwin Muir, *An Autobiography* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2000).

⁵⁰ Brown certainly identified Muir as having political persuasions. Following the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia in 1948, Brown wrote an ‘ID’ sub-titled ‘Orkney Professor in Red Czechoslovakia’, in which he worried about what ramifications the coup would have for Muir. In the article, Brown wrote that Muir ‘certainly seems to favour the idea and practice of Socialism in politics, but it is possible that the Communism which Czechoslovakia has had fathered on it will be too strong a mixture for him.’

George Mackay Brown, Pseudonym: Islandman, ‘ID – Orkney Professor in Red Czechoslovakia’, *OH*, 9th March 1948, p.5.

In the nineteenth century [...] money flowed through the merchants' coffers of Stromness, 'sweat of silver'. There remained always the poor, the fishermen who set lobster creels under the high cliffs westward, and the hinterland crofters with a cow and a few sheep and an outfield and a peatbank.⁵¹

Brown's description of 'there remained always the poor' is telling. There have been 'waves' of progress, economic growth and economic stagnation in Stromness – Hudson's Bay Company, the herring industry and improvements in farming methods – and yet, the poor remained. Brown grew up in an Orkney that was, for some, prosperous. Even 'during the 1930s, when the rest of Britain was suffering from a depression, agriculture in Orkney thrived and was held up as an example to the rest of the country.'⁵² There was plenty of money in Orkney: Brown saw it each day in Stromness as the merchants sloped through the streets or the farmers came into town for supplies. However, his family certainly had no money to spare, and neither did many others – that he was beginning to recognise that some people had money and others simply did not, and that there did not appear to be an easy way to level this, is key in his developing political thoughts.

His family also informed the advancement of those opinions. His parents, particularly his father, instilled beliefs in Brown that he would maintain and explore for years to come. John Brown visited London and Glasgow as a young man and, despite the trips being brief, both left long-standing effects: 'he was haunted for the rest of his life by the wretchedness of the slums in both cities.'⁵³ Note the link to Muir, again, who wrote

⁵¹ Brown, *FI*, p.8.

⁵² Caroline Wickham-Jones, *Orkney: A Historical Guide* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2015) p.207.

⁵³ Reflecting on his father in a 1968 essay, Brown stated that 'the life of the great cities fascinated him, [...] especially the life of the poor. [...] All the islanders were poor, including himself, but our poverty was acceptable and simple, it had dignity and man's eternal need; but William Booth's and Jack London's poor were of an utterly different order, cut from the sources – earth and air and water – and sunk to a place more wretched than animals.' It is interesting that Brown articulates a very similar remembrance of his father's sense of injustice at this situation in this 1968 essay as he does in his posthumously published autobiography: it is an enduring aspect of Brown's memory of his father. George Mackay Brown, 'Childhood in Orkney', *Scottish Field*, 115.788 (1968) p.20. Fergusson, *The Life*, p.21.

about slums and his horror at them in both *Scottish Journey* (1935) and *The Story and the Fable: An Autobiography* (1940),⁵⁴ a book that Schmid states ‘informed Brown’s thoughts on life and poetry at a time when he was looking for order, meaning and direction both personally and artistically.’⁵⁵

Though money for books was never readily available, the Browns were regulars of the Stromness library and John Brown immersed himself in texts that concerned the plight of the poor. Maggie Ferguson describes how he was keen that his children ‘should share these concerns.’⁵⁶ Clearly, he was successful in his aim: when describing his father in his autobiography, Brown stated that

He was always on the side of the poor against the wealthy and over-privileged. I suppose, if he had to define his political stance, he would have called himself a socialist, but a socialist of the Keir Hardie school; Marxism would have been a meaningless, cold abstraction to him.⁵⁷

Evidently, political dialogue between Brown and his father existed. In an article published in *The Orcadian* on the day of the 1974 General Election, Brown recalls that in the 1935 General Election his father supported Sir Robert Hamilton (the Liberal candidate) but only ‘in the absence’⁵⁸ of a candidate further to the left.’⁵⁹

⁵⁴ It is highly probable that Brown read *Scottish Journey*, and absolutely certain that he read *The Story and the Fable*, which he reviewed for the *OH* in 1945 (and referred to in his autobiography). The impact this text left on Brown has been so profound that links between it and his work continue to be made: Simon Hall considers that ‘Asian and continental European journeying ensures, as Muir’s widely-travelled autobiography does, that *Time in a Red Coat* (1984) speaks for a broader-than-Orcadian humanity’ while Linden Bicket states that ‘while it was undoubtedly the peaceful, Edenic childhood of Muir’s autobiography that affected Brown the most, the savagery of farm life depicted by Muir is often found in the necessary agricultural violence of Brown’s poetic and literary landscape.’

Hall, *The History of Orkney Literature*, p.155.

Bicket, *Catholic Imagination*, p.65.

⁵⁵ Schmid, *Keeping the Sources Pure*, p.64.

⁵⁶ Fergusson, *The Life*, p.21.

⁵⁷ Brown, *FI*, p.12.

⁵⁸ Up until 1945, generally only Conservative and Liberal candidates stood in the Orkney and Shetland constituency. Even to the present day, major political parties are not always represented in elections.

⁵⁹ Brown, *LfH*, p.146.

Brown also remembers that his father ‘took the *Daily Herald* (a Labour paper).’⁶⁰ The instillation of family values can help to steer one’s political thinking, and there is evidence of this with Brown. This can also be related to some of Brown’s contemporaries; when Sorley Maclean was asked when ‘the seeds of socialism were planted’⁶¹ within him, he discussed the type of thinking that ‘was in my mother’s blood and my father’s mother’s blood.’⁶²

This support for the poor over the wealthy clearly contributed towards Brown’s fascination with ‘tinkers’. ‘Tinkers’ appear regularly throughout Brown’s prose and poetry, and their role within his creative writing will be explored later in the thesis. In the Highlands and Islands, ‘tinkers’ were usually ‘descendants of vagrants and victims of the Great Famine or the Highland Clearances.’⁶³ Tinkers, however, were not necessarily refugees in search of permanent safety and accommodation: they had ‘no wish for permanent residency. [...] tinkers are continually on the move, within the same country, and across countries. They have neither the right to permanent residence in the receiving country, nor emotive connection to a homeland, nor even an acknowledged homeland to return to.’⁶⁴ Despite their difficulties, there were aspects of the tinkers’ lives that fascinated Brown; perhaps, at times, even to the point of jealousy.

Brown has often attempted to explain his fascination with tinkers:

One reason, I think, is that such people are possessed of a wild, precarious freedom denied to most people who are on the diurnal treadmill of moneymaking and accepted behaviour and whose days are folded together.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Brown, *LfH*, p.146.

⁶¹ Susan R. Wilson, ed, ‘An Interview with Sorley Maclean’ in *The Correspondence Between Hugh MacDiarmid and Sorley Maclean* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011) p.280.

⁶² ‘An Interview with Sorley Maclean’ in *The Correspondence Between Hugh MacDiarmid and Sorley Maclean*, p.280.

⁶³ Judith Okely, *The Traveller-Gypsies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) p.18.

⁶⁴ Tanja Bueltmann, Andrew Hinson and Graeme Morton, *The Scottish Diaspora* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010) p. 20.

⁶⁵ Brown, *FI*, p.19.

This admiration is as much motivated by the tinkers' freedom as it is influenced by a criticism of the rigid, emotionally malnourished structure of working life. Brown's life was surrounded by people, like his father, whose lives would be bound by working long hours whenever and wherever they could, simply in order to have enough to survive. The 'treadmill of moneymaking' is an appropriate metaphor for Brown to use here: life was a challenge for so many people who inhabited Stromness, yet rising to that challenge did not necessarily result in personal gain. People simply kept going yet did not improve their lot. Anyone with the audacity to resist the growing grip that landowners and factory-owners held was, for Brown, worthy of admiration.

In addition to the political rearing that Brown received as a child at home, his awareness of political issues was enhanced by his regular forays into the community. In particular, Brown has referred to the importance of the many hours spent in Peter Esson's Tailor's shop as a child. While his father worked, the shop served as a meeting place for local characters, and their stories and discussions fascinated Brown. Long afternoons in the shop were often spent with his friend Ian MacInnes, who would go on to become rector at Stromness Academy and was a more overt supporter of socialism than Brown. Once a Labour member, he believed that Labour moved too far to the right in the sixties and left the party to join the Scottish Socialist Party. In his prominent role in the community, MacInnes was said to 'put into practice the ideals he believed in - social inclusion, equality of opportunity and a belief that everyone had something good to offer to the community.'⁶⁶ His 'lifelong commitment to socialism was learned early, in Peter Esson's tailor shop'⁶⁷. From an early age, through his father and his father's acquaintances, Brown was exposed to political issues, often from a particular viewpoint.

Why, then, has Brown not been seriously considered as a political writer hitherto? One reason may be that he is often considered as an 'Orcadian' writer more than a 'Scottish' or 'British' writer. There are many contexts in which this consideration is

⁶⁶ Anon, 'Obituary: Ian MacInnes', *The Scotsman*, 18/12/03
<http://www.scotsman.com/news/obituaries/ian-macinnnes-1-498324> [last accessed 2nd August 2017].

⁶⁷ Ibid.

completely understandable and even valid. Brown's distinctiveness from Scottish life in terms of history and identity is promoted by nobody more than Brown himself. When reflecting on his childhood in a 1979 article for *The Orcadian*, Brown wrote that:

the Stromness children of my age grew up loving everything about Scotland and its history but as we got older, our horizons widened a little. We pored over The Orkney Book at slack end-of-term periods. We discovered that the Earl of Orkney had been as powerful as the King of Scots. [...] We began to be proud of our Norse inheritance. We thought of ourselves as sons of the Vikings – there was a great confusion of loyalties.⁶⁸

Critics have taken this 'confusion of loyalties' and used it, as Brown did, to distance him from Scotland and Britain. He was, first and foremost, an Orcadian and treasured his Norse heritage and Orcadian identity. However, there has been a tendency for critics to focus on the upkeep of this Norse identity at the expense of the wider political and social realities that Brown experienced: Eric Linklater wrote of 'the fact that George Mackay Brown is a good poet, a true poet, and essentially a poet of Orkney. Orkney is his persistent theme and constant inspiration.'⁶⁹ It is worth considering the possibility that, as Linklater has articulated, consideration of Brown as an 'Orkney poet' equates to identification of Orkney as his theme and, consequently, a limited appreciation of his thematic capacity. Sabine Schmid recognises this, writing that 'Orkney, as a social, political, and cultural entity, though it spurred his [Brown's] artistic imagination and features strongly in his work, was not the limit of his horizon or the essence of his art.'⁷⁰

Critic Simon Hall argues that 'the idea of the Orkney archipelago is a powerful one; it is immune to historical, linguistic or political disruption; it cannot be altered by events in 1468, 1603, 1707, 1999, or beyond.'⁷¹ In a political sense, Hall may well be able to point to major political points in British history where Orkney has resisted national (be it Scottish or British) patterns, often suggesting a distinct identity and political

⁶⁸ Brown, 'A Confusion of Loyalties' in *UBB*, p.192.

⁶⁹ Eric Linklater, *Orkney and Shetland* (London: Robert Hale Ltd, 1971) p.256.

⁷⁰ Schmid, *Keeping the Sources Pure*, p.34.

⁷¹ Hall, *The History of Orkney Literature*, p.28.

environment. Douglas Dunn has also referred to Orcadian differences within Great Britain, stating that ‘five hundred years or so is a long association; but the record of Orcadian individuality is almost unbroken.’⁷² There are major examples of what Dunn would qualify as examples of Orcadian differences; in the 1979 Scottish Devolution referendum, 72% of the Orcadian electorate opposed more powers for Scotland – 24% more than the national average. In the 1999 devolution referendum, 42% of votes cast in Orkney voted against the installation of a Scottish parliament; the strongest ‘No’ vote of all Scottish local authorities and 17% above the national average. More recently, Orkney delivered a very strong ‘No’ vote in the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum (again, the hardest ‘No’ vote in Scotland - 67%). These statistics suggest that, as Simon Hall claims, the Orkney Islands may well be ‘immune’ to political disruption.

The circumstances of Brown’s family, however, prove that this is not entirely the case. While Orkney may be distant from voting patterns and political disruption on votes for national parliaments or political unions, Orkney is strongly inter-connected within British society and, consequently, its politics. Orkney may not have been at the geographic core of the industrial revolution, but the islands were still indirectly shaped by it; this is illustrated directly by the family lives of the Browns and the Muirs. In more modern times, the political discourse of Great Britain has covered and concerned Orkney: oil has brought prosperity to the Northern Isles and immigration has helped remote island communities survive with fresh injections of people. Food banks are not confined to the de-industrialized heartlands of Northern England: they can be found in Orkney, too.⁷³

In late November of 1944 Brown was settling into his role with the *OH*. His upbringing had led him to be suspicious and questioning of power and readers of the *OH* were beginning to discover this. Brown was starting to find his dissenting voice:

⁷²Douglas Dunn, ‘The Poetry – “Finished Fragrance”’ from *George Mackay Brown: A Survey of his Work and a Full Bibliography* ed. by Hilda D. Spear (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000) p.21.

⁷³Anon, ‘Collection Point for Orkney Foodbank’, *The Orcadian*, 31/03/14 <<https://www.orcadian.co.uk/collection-point-for-orkney-foodbank>> [last accessed 8th July 2017].

The Tory Party is, originally, the party of the aristocracy and the high church. That is to say, it is sworn to uphold the present order of things where by a few privileged persons in State and Church retain for ever their inherited opulence and dignity, while the remaining 99 per cent can scramble through life as best as they can, to the perpetual accompaniment of unemployment, war, disease and ignorance. Lately it has incorporated capitalism into the ideals it must uphold⁷⁴

It is no coincidence that Brown refers to unemployment, war and disease, three things that brought great challenges to his own life. Throughout the article, Brown discusses the need for a General Election and writes that

We in Orkney bear the infiltration of a Conservative MP. In order to ensure that this gentleman does not return to Westminster after 1945, we propose to print one or two articles about his party and, perhaps later, about himself. We have no personal grudge against Major Neven-Spence, but we are certain it would be to his own and our advantage if he were defeated at the next General Election.⁷⁵

Here, we see Brown's awakening as a political commentator. Already, the foundations of the three key areas of Brown's political journalism are present: identification of where power lies, the aim to persuade readers and Brown's hopes for the future. The General Election of 1945 would grant Brown the opportunity to develop his political opinions in print and to persuade people in the process.

In order to explore Brown's politics, it is also essential to discuss key political terms (of the time the articles were written) and how much Brown identified with these. Firstly, an over-arching understanding of 'politics' in accord with the context of these articles must be established. Following this, we must consider the background of party politics of which Brown is writing, and how the term 'socialism' fits into this context. What Brown senses to be 'politics' (or what might constitute 'socialism') may sometimes differ from commonly accepted definitions, and are not necessarily stable with definitions understood in the 21st century.

⁷⁴ George Mackay Brown, 'The Downward Trend of the Tory Party', *OH*, 28th November 1944, p.6.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

‘Politics’ can generally be derived from the Greek *Politikos*, simply meaning something that concerns citizens. In more contemporary terms, Cambridge University Professor of Political Theory, David Runciman describes politics as ‘the collective choices that bind groups of people to live in a particular way. It is also about the collective binds that give people a real choice in how they live’.⁷⁶ Brown is interested in political decisions and, perhaps more explicitly, the journey that both people (and the people) take before arriving at a decision. This interest permeates Brown’s wide-ranging depictions of society - as Linden Bicket states: ‘for Brown, the whole community is important, as well as those outsiders, like the tinkers, who wander through his literary landscape.’⁷⁷

Arguably, Brown’s idea of ‘politics’ feeds from both of these definitions. For example, he sometimes offers opinions in his reporting on British political events, such as the run-up to a general election, largely landing in Runciman’s definition concerning political choice. However, Brown may simply give an opinion on how he views an aspect of society, such as the treatment of women. Such views sit in within the more general definition of politics, as issues concerning the people. This study is not a study of party politics and Brown does not have to refer to a party (or an ideology) in order to give us an insight into his political views. However, there are times in Brown’s journalism when he does, through the nature of his reporting duty, explicitly deal with political parties. Therefore, an understanding of what those parties stood for at the relevant time and the ideologies that motivated these standings is essential.

Between Brown’s birth and the end of the Second World War, the fortunes of political parties rose and fell as regularly, and often as dramatically, as the waves that washed Stromness. These changes, both local and national, were motivated by a number of factors at a time of huge political upheaval. In the 1918 General Election, the recent Representation of the People Act gave the vote to all men over the age of 21 and

⁷⁶ David Runciman, *Politics: Ideas in Profile* (London: Profile Books, 2014) p.6.

⁷⁷ J. Linden Bicket, ‘The Looms of History in George Mackay Brown’s Literary Landscape’, *eSharp, Special Issue: Spinning Scotland: Exploring Literary and Cultural Perspectives* (2009) <<http://www.gla.ac.uk/esharp>> [last accessed 8th April 2016] p.12.

selected women over the age of 30, and returned a Coalition Government. Behind the internal split within the Liberal party, and the Conservatives tussling with them, the Labour Party increased their seats from 42 to 57. This continued a period of consistent, gradual growth for the party since first presenting candidates in 1900.

In addition to a favourable election result, 1918 saw the creation of the Labour Party constitution, in which Labour sought to clarify its aims and distinguish itself from the Liberal Party. A key ingredient of that constitution is what is commonly known as ‘Clause Four’:

To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.⁷⁸

These words, and the actions that they inspired, would be the driving force in the Labour Party evolving into a Socialist party. At the time, *The Guardian* welcomed the constitution by stating that ‘there is now for the first time embodied in the constitution of the party a declaration of political principles, and these principles are definitely Socialistic. ... In other words, the Labour party becomes a Socialist party.’⁷⁹ In the short term, this magnified the appeal of the party – ‘the incorporation of a socialist commitment (Clause IV) into the party’s constitution had ensured Labour’s emergence after the First World War as a modern political party’⁸⁰ and, with the crystallisation of their principles, the Labour Party could now ‘provide an effective alternative to the Conservatives, uniting as it did trade unionists, ideological socialists and the liberal middle class.’⁸¹

⁷⁸ Ian Adams, *Political Ideology Today* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001) p100.

⁷⁹ Aisha Gani, ‘Clause IV: A Brief History’, *The Guardian*, 09/08/15, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/aug/09/clause-iv-of-labour-party-constitution-what-is-all-the-fuss-about-reinstating-it> [last accessed 2nd August 2017].

⁸⁰ Ivan Gibbons, *The British Labour Party and the Establishment of the Irish Free State, 1918-24* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015) p.87.

⁸¹ Ibid.

As Labour's socialistic values were consolidated, they entered coalition Government in 1929 before being obliterated in a 1931 defeat, facilitated by the Great Depression, losing 225 of their seats from two years previous. The key socialistic principles that were stated in the constitution of 1918 still underpinned the party Labour as they entered the 1945 General Election that Brown reported on for the *OH*. The 1945 Labour manifesto stated that:

The Labour Party is a socialist party, and proud of it. Its ultimate purpose at home is the establishment of the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain – free, democratic, efficient, progressive, public-spirited, its material resources organized in the service of the British people.⁸²

Though this is a very substantial, perhaps complex 'ultimate purpose', Labour's methods of achieving this aim were clear: the 'first phase of this transformation would involve the nationalisation of key industries, state regulation of the economy, progressive taxation and the introduction of an egalitarian welfare state.'⁸³ However, the centralisation of government that was fundamental to the 1945 Labour manifesto has been a policy that Labour has gradually moved away from in the latter half of the twentieth century. Most significantly, the birth (and success) of New Labour saw Labour experience 'a significant change in terms of its policy discourse, and this amounts to a break from the traditions of socialism and social democracy.'⁸⁴ Essentially, what the Labour Party represented in the context of 1945 is often vastly different to what the Labour Party represents in the twenty-first century, and the same can be said of every political party across the British political spectrum.

Whereas Brown may have been isolated in a geographical sense, his life (and the lives of his ancestors) was, directly or indirectly, influenced by the ever-evolving nature of the United Kingdom. In 1945, the General Election presented an opportunity for a young Brown to immerse himself in democratic debate concerning how the United Kingdom would continue to develop. In grasping this opportunity, Brown reveals a

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Robert Page, *Revisiting the Welfare State* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2007) p.27.

⁸⁴ Charles Pattie and Steve Ludlam, *British Elections and Parties Review* (London: Psychology Press, 1997) p.110.

level of political consciousness, outlined in Chapter Two, which would resonate throughout his literary career.

Chapter Two - 'The Tillers of Cold Horizons'⁸⁵: Brown's Early Political Journalism

Case Study One – 'Why Toryism Must Fail'⁸⁶

Carla Sassi contends that geopolitics has 'provided a mode of representation adequate to post-modern times, by fusing the two traditionally polarized dimensions, the global and the local.'⁸⁷ As noted by critics,⁸⁸ it is this blending of the local and the global that makes Brown a writer of such significance. Using Orkney as a springboard or a mirror of wider society is not confined to Brown's creative work. Though Brown's journalism almost exclusively appears in local, Orkney newspapers, this does not restrict Brown's subject matter - he approaches topics from an Orkney perspective, but often uses local issues to interrogate broader contexts and vice versa. Brown's political journalism concerns Orkney, Britain and the wider world.

In his 1946 'Politics and the English Language' essay, George Orwell stated that 'in our time it is broadly true that political writing is bad writing. Where it is not true, it will generally be found that the writer is some kind of 'rebel', expressing his private opinions, and not a 'party line.'⁸⁹ As World War Two drew to a conclusion, Orwell underlined the need for dissenting voices as new political paradigms emerged throughout Europe. While it may be unfair to dismiss certain political writing as 'bad' purely by its viewpoint, it is fair to say that challenging, dissenting voices are necessary and healthy components of democratic debate.

Modern political dialogue in the United Kingdom has rarely been more significant than in the run up to the 1945 General Election, when a country that had been decimated by war looked inwards and asked what kind of country they wanted to rebuild - the 1945 Labour manifesto, *Let Us Face the Future*, stated that 'Britain's

⁸⁵ Brown, 'Hamnavoe', p.24.

⁸⁶ A copy of this article is provided in Appendix One, page 117.

⁸⁷ Carla Sassi, *Why Scottish Literature Matters* (Edinburgh: The Saltire Society 2005) p. 114.

⁸⁸ Ferguson, *The Wound and the Gift*, p.374.

⁸⁹ George Orwell, *Politics and the English Language* (London: Penguin Classics 2013) p.13.

upcoming Election will be the greatest test in our history of the judgement and common sense of our people.’⁹⁰ Orkney, like the rest of the UK, was embroiled in political (and social) debate. When discussing Orkney and Brown, Douglas Dunn has argued that ‘there are parts of the British Isles so far from London [...] that they are British only by circumstances of history and geography and not identity.’⁹¹ Following Orkney’s key strategic role in the war efforts for both World War One and World War Two,⁹² Orcadians were very much involved in a discussion that, through circumstances of history and geography, would help to shape the future British identity.

In the 1935 General Election, the Orkney and Shetland constituency elected a Conservative candidate for the first time since 1835: Basil Neven-Spence won 57.6% of the vote as the Unionist Party gained the seat from the Liberals. In 1974, Brown reflected on what was for him, even as a thirteen year old, a memorable evening:

Came the 1935 election. As boys [...] we weren’t allowed to the meetings. But we climbed walls and railings and glimpsed Sir Robert [Hamilton, Orkney and Shetland MP 1922-35] gesturing on the platform. [...] It was very exciting indeed.⁹³

This result in 1935 is generally against the grain of the voting pattern in the Orkney and Shetland constituency - Neven-Spence’s fifteen-year tenure as an MP is the only time that the constituency has not returned a Liberal candidate between 1837 and 2015. The electorate of Orkney and Shetland appear to be relatively loyal to the Liberals (in a variety of guises) and their MPs, with the 65 years between 1950 and 2017, shared between three MPs. However, as the 1945 General Election approached, Orkney and Shetland was far from being considered a safe seat and, for the first time

⁹⁰ ‘Let Us Face the Future: A Declaration of Labour Policy for the Consideration of the Nation’, *Party Manifestos*, <http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/lab45.htm> [last accessed 27th September 2015].

⁹¹ Douglas Dunn, ‘The Poems of George Mackay Brown’, *Poetry Nation* 2, 1974 http://www.pnreview.co.uk/cgi-bin/subscribe?item_id=4044 [last accessed 30th September, 2015].

⁹² Angus Konstam, *Scapa Flow: The Defences of Britain’s Great Fleet Anchorage 1914-45* (London: Osprey Publishing, 2009).

⁹³ Brown, *LfH*, p.146.

in the history of the constituency, the 1945 General Election was fought between three political parties: the Unionist Party, the Liberal Party and the Labour Party, broadening the parameters of the local debate.

In 1945, the outcome of World War Two 'gave rise to a re-defined sense of Britishness, much of it perpetrated by the Ministry of Information that emphasised fairness and social justice.'⁹⁴ This may partly explain the reasons for Labour's victory in the General Election, and also highlights displays of political regionalism that would be unrecognisable today: 'in 1945 the Tory share of the popular vote in Scotland was the same as in England, while Labour's was marginally less. In other words, the Labour surge was not as pronounced in Scotland.'⁹⁵ This is important when considering Brown's journalism: his early writing is anti-establishment and is fairly close to meeting Orwell's criteria: it is the writing of 'a rebel' who is 'expressing his private opinions.'⁹⁶

It has become generally accepted, through the selection and nature of Brown's later, collected articles, that his writings for Orkney newspapers were placid and uncontroversial. In a 1984 interview with Isobel Murray and Bob Tait, Brown briefly yet insightfully discussed his recent 'ID' columns, which made up his collected journalism:

It's just a bit of fun really [...]. I never write controversially – I hate getting caught up in political arguments and religious arguments so I studiously avoid this. [...] very few people write letters to the Editor you know, strangely enough. Well not strangely enough, because they're not controversial at all.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain, 1939-45* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) pp.197-285.

⁹⁵ Richard J Finlay, 'Patriotism, Paternalism and Pragmatism: Scottish Toryism, Union and Empire, 1912-65' from 'Whatever Happened to Tory Scotland?' ed. by David Torrance (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012) p.33.

⁹⁶ Orwell, *Politics and the English Language*, p.13.

⁹⁷ George Mackay Brown, 'A Sequence of Images: George Mackay Brown' in *Scottish Writers Talking: George Mackay Brown, Jessie Kesson, Norman MacCaig, William McIlvanney, David Toulmin, Interviewed by Isobel Murray and Bob Tait* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1996), p.41.

Promoted by Brown himself, this viewpoint, particular to his later, collected articles, is not representative of the whole of Brown's journalism, as this study will illustrate. Iain Crichton Smith, when reflecting on Brown's later articles, would appear to agree with Brown, asserting that

In effect, what we have here is a fairly normal individual, separated from others only by his gift. He is not an intellectual: he has no controversial thoughts. He seems cheerful and well balanced. He does not give the impression that he is lonely (he has a number of friends). The world outside of Orkney does not seem to be of great importance to him.⁹⁸

However, Brown's early journalism, while neither his finest nor his most discussed work, clearly indicates that this was not the case and that 'the world outside Orkney' was, in fact, of great importance to him.

The first case study, 'Why Toryism Must Fail' (appendix one, p.115.), was published in the *OH* on the 6th of March 1945, and Brown begins the article with a summary of the last thousand years of British political history:

A thousand years ago we had the Feudal System in Britain. According to it, absolute temporal power was vested in the king: all his subjects, from the most powerful baron to the most humble serf, were completely under his sway [...]. The next seven hundred years is a great struggle between the crown and the nobility for the control of government.

This is an ambitious summary to attempt in a short newspaper article, but is fairly typical of the expansive (and often unsubstantiated) comments that are regularly found in Brown's articles (for example, his use of 'we' within the context of the previous thousand years is curious considering that Orkney was under Norwegian control until 1468). His use of 'we had' within the framework of a Feudal System is also questionable: under a Feudal System, what the collective population (the 'we') actually had is usually very little. The 'we' simply experience a Feudal System: 'we' do not own it nor have any power within it. Despite what may be interpreted as unspecified generalisations, from the start of this article, Brown is identifying where

⁹⁸ Crichton Smith, Iain, 'Books from the Journalism' in *George Mackay Brown: A Survey of his Work and a Full Bibliography* ed. By Hilda D. Spear (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000) p.14.

power lay and attempting to persuade his readership to his point of view: 'we' unifies his audience and brings them to his own vantage point.

The brief overview of British political history continues when Brown describes the emergence of 'the wealthy merchant class, otherwise known as the Upper Middle Class' (appendix one, p.115) during the Industrial Revolution. Brown employs hostile language in the article when he writes that 'its' (the Upper Middle Class) gospel was capitalism and Industrial Competition, others prefer to call it more frankly, exploitation of the workers' (appendix one, p.115). He continues to discuss the politics of power, one of the three key areas identified and his interpretation regarding capitalism can be seen as deriving from Engels' influential *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*. In this text, Engels⁹⁹ recognises what he perceives as similarities between slaves and the industrial workforce:

The only difference with the old, outspoken slavery is this, that the worker of today seems to be free because he is not sold once for all, but piecemeal by the day, week, the year and because no one owner sells him to another, but he is forced to sell himself in this way instead, being the slave of no particular person, but of the whole property-holding class.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Though it is safe to assume that Brown had access to Engels through a number of public (and perhaps even private) libraries throughout his life, there is no clear evidence to prove either way that Brown read his work. However, writer James D. Young, who shared a room with Brown at Newbattle Abbey College in the 1952-53 academic session, does claim that Brown had engaged with left-wing radicals. In an essay titled 'Memory and Inventive Memory', Young stated that 'towards the end of 1952 Brown was in sympathy with Uncle Joe Stalin before he later converted to Catholicism; and I remember how he wept in his room on learning of Stalin's death.' However, this is not entirely consistent with how Maggie Fergusson reports the political make-up of the Newbattle students. Though Fergusson acknowledges that 'many of the students were passionate communists' and that Tom Wilson 'kept a poster of Stalin above his bed', she writes that 'though he [Brown] had inherited from his father a vague, Keir Hardie socialism, based on sympathy for the oppressed and the exploited, [he] was not much interested in politics'. This comment is fairly typical of the unwillingness to link Brown's sympathy for the oppressed to political thought that has, until now, limited our appreciation and understanding of Brown's politics. James D. Young, 'Memory and Inventive Memory: MacDiarmid, Surrealism and Gibbon: Transition to the War and Afterwards', *Cenchrastus Magazine*, p.19. Fergusson, *The Life*, p. 107.

¹⁰⁰ Frederick Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* (London: Penguin Classics, 1987) p.81.

Evidently, Brown's attitudes towards the abuse of power that he perceives within certain elements of society set him among common ground with influential socialist thinkers.

As 'Why Toryism Must Fail' progresses, Brown continues to deliberate the distribution of power. Brown states that 'when Left-Wing people nowadays rail against the aristocracy, they are only wasting their breath. For the power of the aristocrats declined during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries almost as drastically as the Royal power had previously done' (appendix one, p.115). Brown appears to equate the shifting electorate to a shift in power and, to a certain extent, he is correct in his assertion as to where the power lay - in the 1832 General Election, the electorate of the Orkney and Shetland constituency consisted of 212 people (by 1945 the electorate had risen to 31,468). This quote also gives us an insight into Brown's political feelings and motivations - he is trying to define where the power actually lies before considering how he will voice his opinion. He does not feel that he is 'wasting his breath'; rather, he is attempting to influence current thinking and persuade his readership.

In an effort to make his opinions clear, Brown consolidates a fairly divisive rhetoric throughout the article. This is achieved in a number of ways. Firstly, he attempts to distinguish who the 'enemy' is (who the groups of people are enemies to, however, remains unclear), stating that 'the silk-hatted, church-going, eminently respectable manufacturer and trader' is 'the real and palpable enemy' (appendix one, p.115). This is divisive on a number of fronts, with Brown's use of 'silk-hatted' and its connotations of affluence and power, simply splitting his society in to two camps; 'rich' and 'not rich'.

His use of 'church-going' as a prerequisite for the 'real enemy' may be interpreted as surprising. One of the most closely considered elements of Brown's writing is his religious journey from Protestant youth to adult Catholic conversion. In his biographical study, Ron Ferguson bases a significant amount of his analysis of Brown's spiritual journey around a private letter that Brown wrote to Ernest Marwick in 1947, in which Brown writes

I grow more and more sick of the Church of Scotland. By nature I am interested in religion (if not strictly speaking a religious person) and the pale watery Calvinism of present-day Orkney frankly disgusts me.¹⁰¹

Ferguson goes on to discuss Brown's 'fury against what he saw as a complacent, moralistic Presbyterian establishment.'¹⁰² However, the link between Presbyterianism and the establishment is not substantially explored. In 'Why Toryism Must Fail' Brown identifies this link between the established church and the established politicians, suggesting an angle of approach regarding Brown's spiritual journey: that Brown's rejection of Protestantism may have been accelerated by the regressive role that he perceived the politics of Protestantism to have:

The church unification of 1929 favoured Unionism in that an important series of issues, which had energised liberalism, were no longer prominent. More important was the unambiguously rightward shift of the leadership of Presbyterian churches in the 1920s. The social conscience evident in the late nineteenth century was abandoned, perhaps to curry favour with right-wing governments. (appendix one, p.115)

In 'Why Toryism Must Fail', we see an early example of Brown's attitudes to religion overlapping with his developing political and social thoughts. Linden Bicket has stated that 'Brown's "ID" column often hints at his interest in Catholic rite and aesthetic, as well as broader religious matters'¹⁰³ – within this, it is worth considering how Brown's feelings towards religious concerns are impacted by his political feelings, and vice versa. Years later, Brown wrote in his autobiography about attending mass in Dalkeith several times over the period 1951-2. Though 'disappointed' with the services, Brown remembers that 'the devotion of the working-class women did move me: here they found peace in the midst of drab lives.'¹⁰⁴ Evidently, Brown identifies a link between religious faith, social class and power and sees the Church of Scotland as one of the many bases for the 'establishment' that he appears to be railing against. It is also possible that Brown sees several attendees of the church as using their social position within a community to cement their powerful

¹⁰¹ Ferguson, *The Wound and the Gift*, p. 46.

¹⁰² Ibid., p.49.

¹⁰³ Bicket, *Catholic Imagination*, p.49.

¹⁰⁴ Brown, *FI*, p.45.

positions, and the church facilitating this. Brown's employment of 'church-going' is divisive within the context of this article, separating people of religious faith and people without, and dividing the established Church of Scotland and alternative religious faiths. Bicket has stated that 'Brown's 'Islandman' columns and correspondence from the 1940s and '50s confirm that religious belief often occupied his thoughts. He wrote about religion frequently, and in rather more opinionated terms than in his later, mature correspondence.'¹⁰⁵ It is worth considering that 'Brown's growing antipathy to Calvinism'¹⁰⁶ discussed by Bicket is partially fuelled by the social connections that he seems to make between the Church of Scotland and the political establishment that he explicitly derides.

After describing the 'real and palpable enemy' as being 'silk-hatted' and 'church-going', Brown adds 'eminently respectable manufacturer and trader' to his description. However, he then predicts a change in where power is going to lie:

Fortunately his days in power are almost gone. For a new figure has appeared on the political scene, and will not leave it until he is in sole possession. He is the worker. (appendix one, p.115)

Brown's use of the singular is telling. He refers to both contrasting groups as 'he', highlighting how male dominated 'power' was. In using a singular pronoun for each group, Brown also creates an element of all-encompassing conformity within each camp. In essence, this is an obvious generalisation, and we can see that Brown views politics in somewhat distinct, black-and-white forms (and wants other people to view it in this way too). The natures of these forms are of typical Socialist ethos, and bring Brown in line with some contemporaries. Scott Lyall notes that Hugh MacDiarmid's 'own idea of progress synthesises a Marxian evolutionism that seeks the emancipation of the masses from the promiscuous culture of global capitalism.'¹⁰⁷ This is similar to the idea that Brown is promoting here: the workers are not here purely for power, but to be in 'sole possession' of that power.

¹⁰⁵ Bicket, *Catholic Imagination*, p.48.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.49.

¹⁰⁷ Scott Lyall, *Hugh MacDiarmid's Poetry and Politics of Place* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2006) p.26.

However, the term ‘worker’ in this context is troublesome. Brown scornfully writes that ‘it is always slightly comical to hear any working man or woman declare roundly that he or she is a Tory. A Tory working man is a contradiction in terms. For a Tory implies either a wealthy manufacturer or an elevated Civil Servant or an aristocrat’ (appendix one, p.115). Brown is implying that only physical work allows one to qualify as a ‘worker’, something that is interesting given Brown’s occupation and position within Orcadian society at that time. Brown goes on to explain that there are no wealthy manufacturers or civil servants in Orkney and, regarding aristocrats, that ‘as far as I know, no persons in these islands is of aristocratic descent, unless they claim descent from Queen Victoria’s uncle, William the Fourth, who was said to have left one or two illegitimates in these parts’ (appendix one, p.115). Brown’s tactful ‘as far as I know’ manages to shield a comment that is a strange mix of the comical and the provocative, two features that are almost completely absent in Brown’s later writing for Orkney newspapers. Comments such as this, whether taken seriously or not, show a writer who is able or choosing to express himself with some considerable sense of freedom. We continue to get the impression of a fearless young writer with strong views and even stronger modes of expressing those views.

Brown continues to grapple with the phrase ‘working man’ as the article progresses:

the term “working man” (and 99.9 per cent of Orcadians must work to keep the bite in their mouth) implies that the bearer is a member of a great new caste which must, logically and inevitably, inherit political power for as far ahead as we can see (appendix one, p.115).

This is another example of Brown’s combative approach. His use of language has political connotations, with ‘caste’ invoking a sense of slavery and, consequently, drawing faint but legible links between oppressed people.

When reflecting on his time as a reporter in his autobiography,¹⁰⁸ Brown stated that he tended to take the view that ‘facts are free, comment is sacred.’¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Brown’s autobiography, though a welcome addition to his body of work, is one that is perhaps adversely affected by the self-selective nature of the content. This has been noted by a number of critics, most recently by Linden Bicket who

Though the ‘99.9 per cent of Orcadians’ certainly enters the ‘facts are free’ category, the following content of this quote, and indeed the article as a whole, suggests that comment was not sacred. At this point, Brown is using an Orcadian template to draw his political beliefs: he believes that the ‘worker’ must reach a point of (perhaps absolute) power and, though Brown obviously uses an Orcadian context within a local newspaper to show his views, these local views have a knock-on yet interchangeable relationship with his world-view. Brown believes that the workers are unfairly marginalised in Orkney; he also believes that workers are oppressed across Britain (yet he would be daring to define himself as a ‘worker’ if we apply his own definition). Thus, this is one of the earliest examples of Brown adopting, within his time and space, a position for himself (and consequently his writing) that defied straightforward categorisation:

having made Orkney his point of reflection Brown was not limited to it as a mere locality. Even though he transposed material and ideas he had assimilated from other writers into the Orkney context, he did so with the aim of transcending the merely local, using it as a microcosm of the world.¹¹⁰

This article provides an example of what Schmid describes. Brown believes the social dynamic in Orkney is not just relevant there, but to Great Britain as a whole and, though Schmid is predominantly concerned with Brown’s fiction, we see that some of the roots of this universality take place in his local journalism.

Brown ends the article with a message of hope, that everyone looks ‘towards the future with hope and confidence. For it is there only that the Dawn of Liberation will break’ (appendix one, p.115). In his posthumously published autobiography, Brown wrote that ‘nearly every intelligent young person is a socialist, and has looked to the future with shining eyes.’¹¹¹ This article captures Brown with his shining eyes; the

states that ‘it is probable that most, if not all, readers will be left with questions after the conclusion of Brown’s autobiography.

Bicket, *Catholic Imagination*, p.57.

¹⁰⁹ Brown, *FI* p.53.

¹¹⁰ Schmid, *Keeping the Sources Pure*, p.28.

¹¹¹ Brown, *FI*, p.170.

developing political thoughts of a 23 year-old man - while this gives us a more explicit insight into Brown's political attitudes than we have had before, the second case study will exemplify how Brown attempted to use his voice in Orkney newspapers to further promote his attitudes.

Case Study Two – 'Think Before You Vote' (I)¹¹²

Simplistic division between sections of society can be divisive and dangerous. John Carey argues in *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia* that

the mass is an imaginary construct, displacing the unknowable multiplicity of human life, it can be reshaped at will, in accordance with the wishes of the imaginer. Alternatively, it can be replaced by images, equally arbitrary, of 'typical' mass men or mass women.¹¹³

As Brown's political opinions continued to appear in the *OH* in the run-up to the 1945 General Election, there are traces of both of Carey's points. He achieves this through a blending of both fact and fiction, using statistics to articulate and underscore opinions, but does so against a backdrop of stereotypes (farmers, landowners, workers...) within a community. Brown blends these two things in order to both clearly communicate his political opinions of the time and influence the opinions of others; the mass.

John Carey argues that the rewriting of any mass group of people, whether in fiction or non-fiction, has the same aim: 'to segregate the intellectuals from the mass, and to acquire control over the mass that language gives.'¹¹⁴ In a 1946 'ID, Brown perhaps unwittingly discloses his intention to do exactly this, writing 'I attribute some intelligence to my readers. This diary is not for half-wits, quarter-wits or quite witless people. I am not surprised when they find it boring.'¹¹⁵

¹¹² A copy of this article is provided in Appendix two, p.116.

¹¹³ John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia: 1880-1939* (London: Faber and Faber 1992) p.23.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ George Mackay Brown, Pseudonym: Islandman, 'ID', *OH*, 23rd July 1946, p.7.

The language used in 'Think Before You Vote' highlights how Brown distinguishes between sections of society and himself before amplifying his opinions. Firstly, the title of the article 'Think Before You Vote' suggests how Brown views his Orkney readership. It could be argued that the title is incredibly patronizing: does Brown believe that there is any likelihood that the Orkney electorate would not 'think' before they vote? In the article, the first of a series of 'Think Before You Vote' articles, Brown lists six reasons as to why Orcadians should not vote for the Conservative candidate Basil Neven-Spence, while not encouraging them to vote for any other named candidate or party. Again, the headline is questionable: the reader quickly recognises that Brown is not quite asking the electorate to 'think' for themselves, rather than to mindlessly consume the article and 'think' the same way as him.

The opinions that Brown outlines in 'Think Before You Vote' are, given the time frame, very similar to those expressed in 'Toryism Must Fail'; 'Think Before You Vote' was published on June 12th 1945, three months after 'Toryism Must Fail'. In 'Think Before You Vote', Brown asks the reader to 'consider carefully' his points, with number one, the least detailed, being based on foreign policy:

Conservative policy prior to 1939 was consistent hostility towards Russia. There is no evidence in their ranks of a change of heart towards Russia (see appendix two, p.116).

Brown regards this hostility as the gravest of dangers, but quickly moves on to his second point, without substantially evidencing his first, and writes that 'war with Russia would, quite literally, mean the end of British civilization' (see appendix two, p.116). Evidently, at the start of the article Brown asserts forthright opinions with unsubstantiated reasoning, and he continues that 'Tory mishandling of foreign policy can, quite conceivably, render a remote possibility a terrifying certainty' (see appendix two, p.116). This consolidates the persuasive nature of the article. Brown's use of hyperbole - 'the end of British civilization' - is intended to strike fear into the reader and provoke a reaction.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ As the Liberal Party entered the 1945 General Election, Sir Archibald Sinclair was the MP for the neighboring Caithness and Sutherland constituency and the party leader. The *OH* published a letter from Sinclair, in which he attempted to utilize fear to gain Liberal votes, promising that the Liberal Party would stop 'the

Exploitation of risk and fear is an effective tool of political persuasion, and the emphasis that Brown places on risk relates to contemporary political discourse in Great Britain. In the Scottish Independence Referendum of 2014 and the EU Referendum in 2016, the emphasis (and reliance) on highlighting potential risks was so prominent that it led to political claims being dubbed as ‘project fear’. It has been claimed that in the Scottish Independence Referendum, the Pro-UK Better Together campaign ‘stopped trying to persuade people about certainties, but instead emphasized risk’¹¹⁷ in order to persuade voters that they ‘wouldn’t know and couldn’t be sure.’¹¹⁸ Brown uses similar tactics in this article: identifying risks and exaggerating them in order to persuade his reader.

As Brown approaches the end of his second point, he builds a structure that he maintains throughout the article: after giving his opinion and (sometimes) offering evidence, Brown finishes each bullet point by urging the Orkney constituents to act. In this instance, Brown asks his readers to ‘be sure to ask Major Neven-Spence to define his attitude to Russia’ (appendix two, p.116). This structure outlines the layers of Brown’s political understanding - he is concerned with world, national and local issues and clearly identifies the link between the three: Brown acknowledges Major Neven-Spence’s contribution towards Conservative foreign policy and believes that this contribution can be contended and challenged in the town halls of Orkney. By promoting active participation in local politics, Brown unveils himself as a young man who is not just engaged with ideas of politics, but is also physically invested in the political process.

However, there is more to this article than outlandish opinions and enthusiasm.

Brown’s third point states that

vigorous prosecution of the war against Japan, so as to end it as quickly as possible and to get our men home.’

Sir Archibald Sinclair, ‘A Message from Sir Archibald Sinclair’, *OH*, 3rd Jul 1945, p.3.

¹¹⁷ Joe Pike, *Project Fear: How an Unlikely Alliance Left a Kingdom United but a Country Divided* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2016) p.164.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Major Neven-Spence voted in parliament in July 1939 (in the piping days of peace, mind you) against increasing the Old Age Pension. (Tories' reason – they couldn't afford it). Six months later they were spending six million a day on WAR; and they were spending it to little effect. In 1944 the daily bill was £16,000,000. Yet at the height of our prosperity Neven-Spence's party couldn't give our old people a few extra shillings per week. Major Neven-Spence should most definitely be challenged on this point when he visits your district (appendix two, p.116).

Brown's use of language continues to create a divisive, even at times accusatory, tone. In addition to this, Brown is consistently urging his readership to rise up against his perceived injustices, firmly stating that Neven-Spence 'should most definitely be challenged'. Brown compares the approximate daily war expenditure of £16,000,000 to the 'few extra shillings' that raising the Old Age Pension would equate to. In addition to the tone of his call-to-arms, Brown's questioning of war spending raises a number of key questions: is he criticising the war effort? Is he suggesting pacifist sympathies? Or is Brown writing of inherent nationalism by placing the needs of the British population above all else?

Brown consolidates the idea, clear from 'Toryism Must Fail', that his sympathy lies with the groups of people he identifies as being vulnerable. He prioritises the living conditions of groups of susceptible people above most things and, implicitly, the World War Two effort. By suggesting that money would be better spent on raising the state pension than on the war effort, Brown enters muddy political water. It could be claimed here that Brown is sharing common political ground to that occupied by contemporaries Robin Jenkins or Douglas Young, or that Brown is flirting with the kind of morality-based conscientious objection championed by Norman MacCaig.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ The views of some of Brown's contemporaries regarding World War Two have been documented in Richard McCaffery's recent study *Poets as Legislators: Self, Nation and Possibility in World War Two Scottish Poetry* (2014). While Brown's views towards the Second World War have remained relatively unknown, his early journalism, as we can see from 'Why Toryism Must Fail', may lead to a better understanding of Brown's attitudes in this area. Richard McCaffery, *Poets as Legislators: Self, Nation and Possibility in World War Two Scottish Poetry* (2014) <<http://theses.gla.ac.uk/7049>> [last accessed 12th September 2017].

As Brown approaches the conclusion to the article, he again writes explicit criticisms of capitalism:

a fertile and immensely rich nation like ours has failed under the Capitalist system to produce the goods. That such a system contains very serious flaws must be obvious to everyone. **BUT THE FLAWS HAVE NEVER BEEN ELIMINATED.** They still exist. A continuation of capitalism means ruin, utter and irredeemable. Ask Major Neven-Spence what his party proposes to do about it (appendix two, p.116).

Brown's explosive language marks a continuation and a consistent line of thought from 'Toryism Must Fail'. While these comments may seem simplistic and even naïve, there is a firm conviction behind the 'flaws' of capitalism that Brown writes of here. N.D. Garriock acknowledges some of the living conditions of Stromness that Brown was surrounded by as a child, and during the time of writing 'Think Before You Vote':

Stromness did not get mains electricity until 1946 and only in 1950 were the streets fully illuminated. Even then only shop windows and some privileged homes had the luxury of electric light. [...] Motorised transport is hardly in evidence and the horse-drawn carriage is the main mode of transport. The houses are small-windowed and cramped together, the streets narrow and flagstone-paved, the people poorly dressed and showing all the signs of poverty.¹²⁰

Such context suggests that Brown, far from voicing the opinions of an idealistic young man disconnected from the modern metropolis, is acutely aware of the inequalities within his own small community. N.D Garriock continues:

those who find Brown's work fixated with an apparently distant past should remember this. What may seem to be continued reference to archaic conditions is, to Brown, merely a recollection of the way things were for most of his formative years. It is not artistic empathy but actual memory which allows Brown to so accurately portray period atmosphere.¹²¹

¹²⁰ N.D. Garriock, 'George Mackay Brown: Juvenilia to *Loaves and Fishes*' in *Chapman 60 Special Feature on George Mackay Brown* (Edinburgh: Mayfair Printers 1990) p.1.

¹²¹ Ibid.

This interpretation highlights the importance of Brown's local journalism, for, through it, he is 'transcending the merely local, using it [Orkney] as a microcosm of the world.'¹²² At this stage, Brown is using his *OH* articles as a vehicle to both promote his own opinion and influence the opinions of others.

In the cases of both articles discussed, Brown combines his 'actual memory' and life-experience with issues of political power. It is doubtless dangerous to separate this 'actual memory' from 'artistic empathy'. These two terms, both in Brown's fiction and local journalism, are inter-changeable: his life experiences informed his political opinions, which in turn transmitted to his fiction, often through hardened characters who suffer at the hands of systems which neither benefit nor protect them.

Case Study Three - July 26th In Stromness¹²³

In the 1945 General Election, Hugh MacDiarmid stood as an SNP candidate in the Glasgow Kelvingrove constituency, polling just below 5% of the vote. At the same time, Edwin Muir was writing poetry that Thomas Crawford has stated 'comments on problems that are still facing the most insistent western man – what employment does to the spirit, the tyranny of the left and right, the threat of nuclear war.'¹²⁴ Sorley MacLean's work from this period has much in common with that of MacDiarmid: 'MacLean's subject matter, embodying as it does a Marxist outlook, is political, especially in those poems which are concerned with the rise of fascism, the Spanish Civil War, the Second World War and the possibility of nuclear destruction.'¹²⁵ Political consciousness permeates the thinking, and often the work, of Scottish writers throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

¹²² Schmid, *Keeping the Sources Pure*, p.28.

¹²³ A copy of this article is provided in Appendix three, p.117.

¹²⁴ Thomas Crawford, 'Edwin Muir as a Political Poet', *Literature of the North* ed. by David Hewitt and Michael Spiller (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1983) p.132.

¹²⁵ Raymond J Ross, 'Marx, MacDiarmid and MacLean' in *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays* ed. by Raymond J Ross and Joy Hendry (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986) p.92.

For several writers, political concerns often found their root and development in non-fiction. Margery McCulloch notes in the introduction to *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland 1918-1939* (2004) that

The *Scottish Chapbook* became the first of a number of literary and cultural magazines instituted and edited by Grieve in the 1920s, short-lived, but with an influence far beyond their lifespan. In the early to mid-1930s the *Modern Scot* [...] took over, while from the later 1920s onwards a number of social and political periodicals also came on the scene, such as the *Scots Observer*, supported by the Scottish Protestant Churches, the nationalist *Scots Independent*, the *Pictish Review* committed to Gaelic culture, and the *Free Man*, independent of specific affiliations but offering a platform to those who wished to explore new ways forward for Scotland. The *Scots Magazine* [...] published many energetic articles by [...] Neil Gunn about the need for regeneration in the Highlands and about the complementary nature of nationalism and internationalism. All of these magazines, however, whether predominantly cultural or ideological, provided an interactive mixture of art, politics and social questions in their pages to which most of the principal creative writers at one time or another contributed [...]. They thus became an important forum for the exchange of ideas about Scotland's future.¹²⁶

For these writers, the political themes that are often found in their creative work is also present in their non-fiction, be it articles that appeared in magazines or journalism. Until now, Brown has not been seriously considered as a writer of political concern.

Journalism has long provided fertile ground for the growth of writers in Scotland, right up until the present day. To give just one example, Ewan Morrisson, Irvine Welsh and Robert Alan Jamieson have all contributed to *Bella Caledonia*, an online magazine that publishes political and social commentary. In June 2017, the magazine had a readership of over 363,000.¹²⁷ Today, just as in the first half of the twentieth

¹²⁶ Margery Palmer McCulloch, 'Introduction' in *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland 1918-1939* (Glasgow: The Association for Scottish Literary Studies 2004) p.xiv.

¹²⁷ Mike Small, 'Bella is Growing but Needs Your Support', *Bella Caledonia*, 12/07/17 <http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2017/07/12/bella-is-growing-but-needs-your-support/> [last accessed 2nd August 2017].

century, the role of journalism is not just important for the sharing of ideas, but for the development of the writers who are articulating those ideas.

Deborah Philips explains that ‘politics and literature could potentially point to a range of arenas: literature that directly addresses political subjects to literary works that have a direct political purpose.’¹²⁸ We know that Brown deals with numerous political subjects in his literature: Nazism in *Magnus*, environmental issues in *Greenvoe*, education in *The Golden Bird* amongst others. The manner in which Brown explores these political issues relates directly to Philips’s view. Evaluation of ‘Why Toryism Must Fail’ and ‘Think Before You Vote’ does not just give us an increased understanding of Brown’s personal politics, but illustrates the direct political purpose of his early journalism.

Given the timeframe of the articles analyzed (around the 1945 General Election), the information we glean about Brown’s political views is understandably delivered by discussion of party politics. It is important to recognise the political environment in which these parties operated in 1945 and how Brown engages with this. In the first half of the twentieth century, political parties were more easily identifiable in terms of both party policy and core group. It is generally accepted that ‘from the 1950s on, some elite and mass parties transformed their organizations to become “catch all parties” which pursued a broader range of voters than did the elite and mass parties of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.’¹²⁹ In moving into “catch all parties”, the key messages that political parties promote can (and has) become diluted, with a prime example being the transition from Labour to New Labour in the 1990s. At the time that Brown is writing these articles, however, the few main parties in the UK hold more clearly defined values. These values are firmly grasped by Brown, and he builds his political beliefs accordingly, linking, for example, socialism quite clearly to the Labour party and referring to the party members as ‘socialists’. Such transparent

¹²⁸ Deborah Philips, ‘The Politics of Literature and the Literature of Politics’ in *Literary Politics: The Politics of Literature and the Literature of Politics*, Eds. By Deborah Philips and Katy Shaw (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013) p.7.

¹²⁹ Thomas Saalfeld and Kaare Storm, ‘Political Parties and Legislators’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Legislative Studies* Ed. By Shane Martin, Thomas Saalfeld and Kaare Storm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) p.378.

links between party politics and political ideologies could not be so easily or directly drawn in the current political climate.

The nature of the political awareness of emerging (and established) Scottish writers was obviously present in a number of forms. 1945 was a time when cultural, national, and political boundaries were being re-drawn and, within this, the search for subsequent identities was taking place. Consequently, writers often found themselves juggling the local with the universal in terms of thematic approach and political allegiance. Carla Sassi argues that several writers, particularly MacDiarmid and Gibbon, pursued ‘an attempt to ally what were then seen as two irreconcilable perspectives, namely the wish to be a citizen of the global Cosmopolis and yet maintain a proud “provincial” standpoint.’¹³⁰ The basic political root of this wish can be articulated within the internal quandary of a general election: does one vote for their local candidate, or for the national party? How strong is the link between the two? What position can a local candidate demonstrate on a national or even international stage? As the results for the 1945 General Election arrived, Brown reflected on what the result meant to Orcadians on a local and national level.

In a local sense, the outcome of the 1945 General Election was disappointing for Brown. Despite his efforts in print, Conservative Basil Neven-Spence was returned as Member of Parliament for Orkney and Shetland, a mere 329 votes ahead of Liberal Party candidate Joseph Grimond. However, the national picture was more pleasing for Brown, with Clement Attlee and the Labour Party sweeping to victory following an 11.7% swing. Brown notes this inconsistency between national and local outcomes in the opening lines of an article reflecting on the election outcome, titled ‘July 26th in Stromness’: It is really difficult to give you a clear picture of the reactions of the Stromness people to the General Election results announced last Thursday. (appendix three, p.117) Rather than purely focusing on the local, which would be understandable given the article appears in a local newspaper, Brown goes on to relate the Orcadian reaction to the election experience to the broader national picture. As Seamus Heaney noted, Brown ‘transforms everything by passing it through the eye of the needle of

¹³⁰ Carla Sassi, ‘Vernacular Cosmopolitans. The Politics of the Scottish Renaissance’ in *Why Scottish Literature Matters*, (Edinburgh: The Saltire Society, 2005) p.114.

Orkney'¹³¹: we can see the foundation of this being built in his early journalistic writing.

Brown describes the local Labour performance as encouraging. He correctly labels Labour candidate Prophet J.L. Smith's near 30% of the vote (29.8%) as promising for the Labour future in the area, notably so as this is the first Labour candidate in this constituency. Brown reckons that 'the Socialists of Orkney feel entitled to be highly optimistic over the result of the next Orkney and Shetland election' (appendix three, p.117). This positivity over Labour's local fortunes, though understandable, was ultimately misplaced: the 29.8% that Labour polled in 1945 is still their strongest performance in the constituency and, most recently in the 2017 General Election, Labour polled just 11% of the vote. Evidently, Orkney is far from a hotbed of socialism, but one could be forgiven for thinking otherwise having read Brown's reflections on the 1945 election.

As 'July 26th in Stromness' progresses, Brown starts to anecdotally reflect on the day, writing that

I witnessed scenes of enthusiasm which no man is likely to see more than two or three times in his life. One local lady (obviously a Socialist) danced across the street in her enthusiasm. Another is said to have cut a huge square out of the back of her husband's Sunday shirt, dipped it in a bowl of scarlet dye, and then nailed this improvised Red Flag to the clothes-pole in her garden. Everywhere I went I encountered socialists wearing a smile of invincible triumph (appendix three, p.117).

Through decidedly (almost comic) provincial descriptions, Brown manages to capture the reactions of millions of people across the UK at Labour's unexpected triumph. We also see traditional gender stereotypes employed by Brown: note the second woman dealing with her husband's shirt and the mention of 'her' garden rather than 'their'. In his explorations of an old-fashioned Orcadian setting in his fiction, Brown also depicts traditional gender roles. In *WR*, Flaw's partner Peterina states that:

¹³¹ Sean O'Hagan, 'This Scottish poet's epitaph? Et in Orcadia', *The Observer* (2006)
<<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/apr/16/biography.features1>> [last accessed 14th March 2016].

I will try to be a good wife to you, Andrew Flaws. [...] I must make a blanket for the bed, and a christening shawl for the first bairn, and two shrouds, one for you and one for me.¹³²

The blanket and christening shawl in Brown's fiction and the makeshift red flag from his journalism all emerge from domestic sources and are consequently the responsibility of the female. Brown's idea of gender responsibilities is, however, understandable, not just because of the point in time in which he is living, but also because of his own experiences. In Ron Ferguson's *The Wound and the Gift*, Morag MacInnes describes Brown's mother's attitude towards her youngest son: "'nothing's too good for George'" was what she [Brown's mother] used to say. [...] George was spoiled rotten. His mother did everything for him.'¹³³ Like his experiences of tinkers and drinkers roaming the roads of Orkney, Brown's experiences at home shaped a world from which he borrowed for his writing. Again, we see Brown's own experiences inform his early journalism before translating into his later fiction.

The often sneering, at times aggressive, tone of his early journalism is at odds with that of his later, better-known, newspaper columns. Maggie Ferguson refers to Brown's reflections on these articles in later life: 'his remarks, he admitted, had often been injudicious; he had thrown his weight about 'like a young dog who has never felt the stick.'¹³⁴ For some of Brown's writing from this time, this is a very appropriate simile, but this is not always because of his tone; it is also due to the ideas expressed within his writing. As Brown continued to reflect on the election results, he stated that

In the evening of that memorable day, as the shades lengthened, I regret to state that some of them [Labour Supporters] went to celebrate their great victory in the canteens and came home [...] spiritually as well as politically intoxicated (appendix three, p.117).

The notion of Brown stating his 'regret' at the intoxication of some may be amusing to those who knew him personally, but also tells us about the conditions in Stromness

¹³² George Mackay Brown, 'WR' in *TK and Other Stories* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1972) p.130.

¹³³ Ferguson, *The Wound and the Gift*, p. 14.

¹³⁴ Fergusson, *The Life*, p. 78.

at the time and the magnitude of celebration. It wasn't until 1947 that Stromness voted itself 'wet' and the social hangover of the long dry period that spanned from 1918 to 1948 was still acute when entering pubs in the years after the prohibition had ended. In his autobiography, Brown writes 'I remember how, in the months following [the end of prohibition], we used to approach the bar door furtively, looking to right and left, covering the last few yards quickly. It was still a shameful thing to be seen entering a "den of iniquity". But I grew a carapace.'¹³⁵ It is worth noting that, in this instance and at this point, Brown does not stray from general Orcadian social attitudes:¹³⁶ drinking alcohol is viewed with disapproval by general Orcadian society, as it is with Brown.

Brown's 'regret' at Labour supporters returning home intoxicated is not just an amusing display of eventual hypocrisy, but an insight into the 'springboard' that Schmid describes:

an early poem, 'Prayer to Magnus', published in *The New Shetlander* on 6 October, 1947 [...] was one of Brown's first attempts at utilizing themes which were to become central to his later work. [...] The time spent at Newbattle allowed him to acquire additional literary skills and the necessary confidence in his potential.¹³⁷

The importance of Newbattle to Brown's development is undeniable.¹³⁸ However, we can see from Brown's *OH* journalism that key themes explored in his later 'creative' writing – social justice, morality, alienation and progress – were central to his

¹³⁵ Brown, *FI*, p.58.

¹³⁶ Following the end of prohibition, the *OH* reported that 'without any waving of flags or spectacular change in the atmosphere, the banner of temperance, which has fluttered over the chimneys of Stromness for 27 years to the very day and hour, was lowered and the licensing banner went up in its place at noon last Friday.' The tentative approach to alcohol is summarized with the headline of the front-page article, 'Stromness Takes to Drink Again...Quietly'. The article is anonymous, and it is possible that Brown was involved in its construction. Anon, 'Stromness Takes to Drink Again...Quietly', *OH*, 1st June 1948, p.1.

¹³⁷ Schmid, *Keeping the Sources Pure*, p.50.

¹³⁸ Brown enrolled at Newbattle Abbey College, an adult education college where Edwin Muir was warden, in 1951. After initial homesickness, Brown flourished both creatively and socially at Newbattle under the careful guidance of Muir within a vibrant artistic atmosphere. Though he was only there for one year, Brown later reflected that Newbattle made 'actual the might-have-been.' Fergusson, *The Life*, p. 102-12.

journalism well before his debut collection of poetry, *The Storm* of 1954, the stay at Newbattle in 1951 and periodical publications such as 'Prayer to Magnus', specified by Schmid.

Brown continues to report on how Labour supporters celebrated their victory, reporting that, in London, socialists gathered at Central Hall and sang what Brown describes as a 'great anthem' (appendix three, p.117), namely William Blake's 'Jerusalem'. In bringing this to the Orkney readership, Brown quotes a section of the lyrics:

I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land.¹³⁹

He goes on to state that this verse 'embodies so many of their [Labour's] ideals and desires' (appendix three, p.117). Brown is correct in this reckoning; to this day, 'Jerusalem' is sung (as well as 'The Red Flag') to close Labour Party Conferences. At the crux of the anthem (particularly the section selected by Brown) is the struggle of opposition and the determination to oppose oppressive forces. Many commentators believe that Blake outlines an idealized future vision of England – 'one possible future which could only be born out of unwavering resistance.'¹⁴⁰ Clearly, Brown supports this struggle. This resistance to those in power can regularly be found in Brown's later writing, particularly his fiction. Bill, the afore-mentioned, marginalized, oppressed crofter from *TK* (1969) encapsulates his values in an almost pagan Christening. After the death of his wife, Ingi, following childbirth, a desperate Bill takes his son to the beach, where he begs the infant to

'Be honest', I said. 'Be against all darkness. Fight on the side of life. Be against ministers, lairds, shopkeepers. Be brave always.'¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ William Blake, 'Jerusalem' from *William Blake: Songs of Innocence and of Experience: Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul* (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 1970) p.9.

¹⁴⁰ Judy Cox, 'Blake's Jerusalem', *The Socialist Review* (2012) <<http://socialistreview.org.uk/372/blakes-jerusalem>> [accessed 14 March 2016].

¹⁴¹ George Mackay Brown, 'TK' in *TK and Other Stories* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1972) p.60.

In *TK*, powerful figures in society represent the ‘darkness’ that Bill refers to – shop owner Mr. Sinclair arrives in an extravagant ‘black ford’¹⁴² car and the factor gives Bill a ‘black look’¹⁴³ as he ‘thudded’ a stamp on a receipt. Bill, however, refuses to submit to those in authority and even takes a level of pride in his low social standing, telling his wife that ‘we’re poor people. Remember that’.¹⁴⁴ What we ultimately see in Bill, however, is a character who is determined to build what he perceives to be a better life for himself and, as an extension, a better, fairer society for all. Bill resists the external forces that he thinks are trying to skew society: he refuses to attend church, dismissively describing sermons as ‘a fairy tale’ and refuses to bow to unreasonable demands from the factor. Importantly, Bill does not build his opposition on a position of ignorance: while debating a point with the factor, he asks ‘did you never hear of the Crofters’ Act of 1888?’¹⁴⁵ In this short story, Bill spearheads an educated working class as they prepare for the ‘mental fight’ that is referred to in Blake’s *Jerusalem*, translating his political attitudes into his fictional tapestry.

Having reported on how the election result was received by Orcadians, Brown concludes ‘July 26th in Stromness’ by looking to the future. In doing so, he offers his opinion in a more explicit way than the previous content of the article:

It was a great day for Labour. I and millions of others look forward to a long and fruitful period of intellectual and social progress among all our people. We look forward to the day when, out of the squalor and muddle and poverty of the present, the promised new Jerusalem arrives on England’s green and pleasant land. (appendix three, p.117)

Evidently, Brown is looking to the future with great optimism. Morag MacInnes informed Ron Ferguson that, at the time of the war, Brown was ‘out of things. He wasn’t interested in the politics of the war, so he withdrew [from society], and his mother looked after him.’¹⁴⁶ While Brown may not have been explicitly interested in the international politics of a world war, he did clearly identify the

¹⁴² Ibid, p.46.

¹⁴³ Ibid, p.43.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, p.42.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. p.64.

¹⁴⁶ Ferguson, *The Wound and the Gift*, p. 13.

ways in which local politics could contribute to the national and into the universal. The 1945 General Election was not simply an assignment for a young reporter, but an awakening for a young man who, up until this point in his life, did not have a lot to be optimistic about. With the promise of a fairer society and the idea of social progress in the air, the outcome of the 1945 Election gave a despondent Brown some hope. All three case studies discussed here illustrate a pattern in Brown's early journalism: his preoccupation with political power, the necessity he feels to persuade his peers to engage, think and act politically, and ultimately his belief that in so doing they can shape a more hopeful future for themselves and others.

Chapter Three – ‘Puffing Red Sails’¹⁴⁷ - The Progression of Brown’s Political Journalism

After holding on to a very slim majority in the 1950 General Election, the Labour Government was forced into calling another General Election in 1951. The hope that Brown held following the 1945 General Election had not been extinguished, but Labour’s term was not an overwhelming success; ‘they had started with boundless ambition. They had envisaged a total transformation of society, but they were only able to fulfill a fraction of their programme, namely the achievement of what came to be known as the Welfare State.’¹⁴⁸

From a local perspective for Brown, the 1950 General Election resulted in change in the Orkney and Shetland constituency. Liberal candidate Joseph Grimmond was elected as a Member of Parliament and went on to represent the constituency until his retirement in 1983, cementing the constituency as the Liberal stronghold that it remains to this day.

The articles analysed in Chapter Two have disclosed the firm socialist convictions of an out-of-sorts Brown who was searching for a place in society. By the time of the 1951 General Election, Brown was a 30-year-old mature student studying at Newbattle Abbey, just outside Edinburgh. His contribution to the 1951 debate will further inform us regarding the development and strength of his political opinions. The week before the General Election of 1951, *The Orcadian* newspaper published a feature titled ‘Election Forum’. This discussion involved a number of writers advocating different points of view, aiming to persuade people to vote for a specific party. Brown contributed the ‘Labour’ section of the debate. Until now, this article has not been discussed in Brown biography or criticism.

Brown opens the article thus:

In the thirties the Conservatives were almost continuously in power.
The memories of the people are short if they do not retain a vivid

¹⁴⁷ Brown, ‘Hamnavoe’, p.24.

¹⁴⁸ Francois Bedarida, *A Social History of England 1851-1990* (London: Routledge, 1991) p.192.

memory of the appalling squalor and misery of the period – widespread unemployment, mal-nutrition, the ever-growing menace of war.¹⁴⁹

In a similar manner to Brown's 'Think Before You Vote' article six years earlier, Brown begins by attacking the Conservative Party rather than promoting the Labour Party:

even in the Orkney of those bad Tory days, I remember the queues outside the Labour exchange on a Friday morning waiting for the "dole" and the constant fear of unemployment abroad everywhere.¹⁵⁰

This is an explicit reference regarding both Brown's childhood memories and the centrality of those memories - memory is a constant voice in internal political deliberation and 'how we grapple with memory of the past is intimately tied to how we acknowledge and understand our differences in the present.'¹⁵¹ Memory is a key ingredient of the political regionalism that remains strong in Great Britain today. For example, Labour's seats throughout Britain are still largely found in northern areas where there was once heavy industry, despite that industry often no longer being present. When evaluating the reasons for the Conservative party's struggle to make substantial breakthroughs in these seats, political commentator and former YouGov president Peter Kellner found that 'objective factors – whether economic, social or employment – account for only a small part of the gulf in Tory fortunes between South and North.'¹⁵² Kellner's extensive research concluded that 'in the end, the Tories' problem is not what they *do*; it is what they *are*. Their trouble is their brand.'¹⁵³ Essentially, if one has negative memories that they perceive to be partially due to the actions of a political party, this will continue to be at the forefront of their political-decision making for years to come, partially explaining political regionalism

¹⁴⁹ George M. Brown, 'Election Forum: Labour', *The Orcadian*, 18th October 1951, p.2.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Phillip J Brendese, *The Power of Memory in Democratic Politics* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2014) p.2.

¹⁵² Peter Kellner, 'Why Northerners Don't Vote Tory', *YouGov* (2013) <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2013/10/21/why-northerners-dont-vote-tory/> [last accessed 29th June 2016].

¹⁵³ Ibid.

within the UK and Brown's now well-rooted dislike of the Conservative Party. Brown confirms this when states that he believes it was 'the Conservative policy of that era to maintain a large 'unemployment pool' as an incentive to high-production. They frightened the workers into churning out the profits for them. That is why any person whose memory is not blunted must dislike the Tories.'¹⁵⁴

Brown adopts a more positive tone in the article at times and, usually when doing so, emphasises the importance of hope:

the Labour Government since 1945, in spite of unparalleled difficulties, has maintained full employment. Whatever its faults, it has not sought to run this country on fear. That is one reason why I shall vote Labour.¹⁵⁵

As with Brown's 'Think Before You Vote' article, 'fear' has again been identified as a key weapon in the political fight and Brown's vocalization of this shows a considerable level of political consciousness. In contemporary society, political discourse is still regularly fueled by fear:

We live in a culture of fear. Terrorists, internet stalkers, crystal meth, avian flu, genetically modified organisms, contaminated food: new threats seem to spout like poisonous mushrooms.¹⁵⁶

This awareness and rejection of fear as part of the political debate is not present in articles penned by Brown in the years just before this and this, therefore, could suggest a certain newfound maturity. In 'Think Before You Vote', Brown utilizes fear to project his argument: here, his confronting and grappling with it helps him build a more hopeful image of Britain's prospects.

Furthermore, he portrays hope by articulating his faith within the moral compass of the Labour Party:

perhaps Labour's most notable contribution to British social history is the health scheme, and the establishment of social security. From

¹⁵⁴ Brown, 'Election Forum: Labour', p.2.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Dan Gardner, *Risk: The Politics and Science of Fear* (London: Virgin, 2009) p.6.

now on there is no such thing as abject poverty. From now on there is no such thing as the good citizen letting himself die because he cannot afford to consult the doctor and, after the doctor, the specialist...¹⁵⁷

Brown was personally aware of the importance of these social benefits: he had claimed national assistance and spent a substantial amount of time recuperating from Tuberculosis in Eastbank Hospital in Kirkwall. His repetition of ‘from now on’ shows his determination for the country to hold on to the welfare support that the Labour Party had introduced and he clearly identifies with the welfare state as Labour’s key achievement and subscribes to the ‘notion of the welfare state as primarily a project of democratic socialism.’¹⁵⁸ Though Brown was not working in the same journalistic capacity as he was in the run-up to the 1945 General Election – this article appears in *The Orcadian* rather than the *OH*, where his reporting had become more sporadic - he is well-informed on the debate and his interest remains undiminished. In its 1950 manifesto, the Labour party stated that ‘this social legislation has benefitted *all* sections of community. [...] families have been relieved of one of their worst anxieties – the fear of the sudden illness, the expensive operation, the doctor’s crippling bills.’¹⁵⁹ As in 1945, Brown is aware of the vital areas of political debate.

At this point, Brown’s support for mutual co-operation between citizens of the UK illustrates clearly that his moral compass goes well beyond his locality. Such a standpoint challenges Berthold Schoene’s view that

although there are many parallels and correspondences between the life of the Orcadians and that of people elsewhere it remains doubtful if it has ever been Brown’s concern to draw us to such likeness.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Brown, ‘Election Forum: Labour’, p.2.

¹⁵⁸ Per Arnt Petterson, ‘The Welfare State: The Security Dimension’ in *The Scope of Government* eds. Ole Borre and Elinor Scarbrough (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) p.226.

¹⁵⁹ Robert Page, *Revisiting the Welfare State* (Maidenhead: Open University Press 2007) p.39.

¹⁶⁰ Berthold Schoene, *The Making of Orcadia*, p.68.

As such, Scheone's doubts may be misplaced. Brown's journalism shows a writer who, rather than trying to draw parallels between Orcadians and people elsewhere, perhaps did not distinguish between them in the first place.

Brown did not differentiate between groups of people because he recognised the importance of social cohesion. In the 1951 General Election the Labour Party, as in 1945, 'wanted to break down the restrictive social barriers which led to frustration and resentment by those lower down the social scale.'¹⁶¹ This was key common political ground that the party shared with Brown, highlighted in 'Election Forum', when he writes that

I would not vote Conservative because in all the party's history, they have shown themselves inimical to all the forward movements in the country's social history.¹⁶²

This contradicts some beliefs regarding Brown's feelings towards 'progress'. For example, in the *Catholic Herald*, academic Joseph Pearce stated that 'for Brown, the barrenness and bleakness of Calvinism led to the desert of modernity and its rootless "progress". Against this lifeless wasteland stood Tradition, as enshrined within the Catholic Church.'¹⁶³ Brown's writing in 'Election Forum' consolidates the suggestion in Chapter Two that Brown's feelings towards progress are not as clearly defined as sometimes previously thought and that they find their source in a variety of networks, not simply in Brown's spiritual core. 'Election Forum' shows that Brown believes the Labour Party to be progressive and emanating from a moral, social consciousness, and that he wants this progress to continue. In a 1987 interview with Satish Kumar of *Resurgence* magazine, we see that Brown's opinions on progress are consistent: they do not depend on spiritualism or materialism, but a balance of the two that is often defined by politics:

¹⁶¹ Martin Francis, *Ideas and Policy Under Labour, 1945-51: Building a New Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) p.27.

¹⁶² Brown, 'Election Forum: Labour', p.2.

¹⁶³ Joseph Pearce, 'Escape from a Puritan Wasteland', *Catholic Herald* (2016) <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/commentandblogs/2016/04/14/escape-from-a-puritan-wasteland/> [last accessed 22nd June 2016].

Kumar: Do you feel that industrial progress has gone a bit too far, it doesn't know its limits?

Brown: Exactly, yes. It has gone far too far and it shows no sign of letting up – and of course we can see the final result is coming into view now with nuclear power and nuclear weapons. The human race has never been in danger of complete extinction before, but we are faced with that possibility now.

Kumar: What is it that makes us take such a road?

Brown: There's a kind of imbalance somewhere. I think humanity had an instinctive wisdom that kept a balance between materialism and spirituality, but somewhere way back, 300 years or so ago, the balance tipped finally on the side of materialism.¹⁶⁴

As in 'Election Forum', Brown is concerned here with how material developments are channeled by politicians, and the consequent impact that they will have on the human spirit and, consequently, society.

Brown concludes 'Election Forum' by considering the merits of Liberalism and Orkney's MP:

I admire the work that Jo Grimond has done for Orkney in Parliament, and think that he is a first-rate MP. But I think that his party is doomed as a political force. The spirit of Liberalism, however, is still very vivid and potent, and is seen, if anywhere nowadays, in Labour policy. I shall therefore vote for Mr Fairnie [the Labour candidate for Orkney and Shetland] on October 25th.¹⁶⁵

The close of this article shows a shift in tone from Brown's journalism in 1945. For the first time, Brown acknowledges the merits of other political ideologies and identifies crossover between political parties. There is a sense that Brown's conviction (as illustrated clearly in Chapter One of this study), at times, prevented him from productively engaging with alternative dialogues; in 1951, however, Brown is more mature in his approach to political discussion.

¹⁶⁴ 'Orkney Oracle – George Mackay Brown', *Resurgence*, 122 (May 1987) p.6.

¹⁶⁵ Brown, 'Election Forum: Labour', p.2.

From Island Journalism to Island Diary

By the end of the summer of 1945, Brown had created a local voice that demanded to be listened to. He had ‘found that he was good at stirring up controversy, seeming at times to do his best to get his readers going, engaging in running fights, flying [...], and being deliberately provocative, to the point of rudeness.’¹⁶⁶ The *OH* recognised Brown’s ability to invigorate discussion and, on the 25th September 1945,¹⁶⁷ Brown’s first ‘ID’ column appeared in the *OH* under the pseudonym ‘Islandman’. ‘ID’ became a regular column, and it enabled Brown to articulate his political (and moral) thoughts in a more indirect way. The column appeared until 1956, with bouts of ill-health making articles at times sporadic. Between 1945 and 1956, however, Brown did have other writings published in the *OH*, occasionally under other pseudonyms such as ‘Hjal’ and ‘Westerner’. In addition to these, there are a number of anonymous ‘Opinion’ articles that Brian Murray feels ‘have a turn of phrase and a range of preoccupations [...] typical of Brown.’¹⁶⁸

The commencement of ‘ID’ is important regarding Brown’s development for a number of reasons. Firstly, the column gives Brown the opportunity to write for a sizable audience on matters other than current news. The flexibility of the column, in addition to the use of a pseudonym (though it is extremely likely that most regular readers knew who ‘Islandman’ was) gave Brown thematic freedom in the newspaper that he had not always previously had. In addition to this, the liberal outlook¹⁶⁹ of the *OH* afforded fertile ground for the debates that Brown wished to have – when his editor, James Twatt, died the paper described him as ‘an editor of the old school [...]

¹⁶⁶ Brian Murray and Rowena Murray, *The Interrogation of Silence: The Writings of George Mackay Brown* (London: John Murray Publishers, 2004) p.32.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p.33.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p.32.

¹⁶⁹ There are occasions when the *OH*, rarely for a local newspaper, holds and promotes particular political opinions. For example, in the run-up to the 1945 General Election, there are a huge number of articles that either attack the Conservative candidate, Basil Neven-Spence, promote the Liberal candidate, Jo Grimond, or both. On the 3rd of July 1945 alone, the following articles are published: ‘Why I am Voting Against the Tories – Their Record of Failure Condemns Them’, ‘Why Women Should Vote Liberal’ and ‘Major Grimond Storms the Tory Stronghold’, the latter of which was written by Brown. *OH*, 3rd July 1945, pp. 4-5.

and always willing to present both sides of the case. In the political field he was a staunch upholder of his paper's liberal tradition.¹⁷⁰ Brown's early journalism has investigated his way of viewing the world: his columns then give Brown the opportunity to explore that world. Brian Murray states that Brown's early writing for the *OH*

did give readers a vivid impression of life, people, issues and events in the town, but, as he saw it, his 'ID' and other series invested his journalism with cultural significance. Clearly, Brown saw himself as a journalist with a cultural mission, and not necessarily an easy one. His critique was, in many ways, the foundation of his subsequent serial reinvention of Orkney.¹⁷¹

Bridging the gap between Brown's early political journalism and his creative writing, his 'ID' column maps Brown's progression from political activist to cultural missionary.

The articles previously referred to highlight a level of political consciousness and conviction in Brown that has not previously been acknowledged. Until now, critics have tended to focus on Brown's tone and approach to local journalism rather than the content: Ron Ferguson has written that 'in [Brown's] personal life he was shy and retiring; in print he felt freer to be combative and rude.'¹⁷² This focus has been driven by Brown himself – when reflecting on his early journalism, he stated that 'I have a peculiar and perverse gift...of being able to sneer at people in print: a gift I am quite innocent of in normal conversation.'¹⁷³ It is possible that the contrasting tone between Brown's early and later writings for newspapers has limited rather than expanded general appreciation of this aspect of his work - on the rare occasions when critics have commented on early *Island Diaries*, they have most often focused on Brown's sneering tone, rather than examining the substance of his arguments. It is possible that this attention has again been directed by Brown himself, who remembered that he was

¹⁷⁰ Anon, 'The Late Mr James Twatt', *OH*, 26th June 1951, p.1.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.33.

¹⁷² Ferguson, *The Wound and the Gift*, p. 17.

¹⁷³ Murray and Murray, *Interrogation*, p.33.

‘violently and viciously attacked by no less than three irate correspondents simultaneously.’¹⁷⁴

What Brown did not disclose in the latter years of his career was that, at the time of his controversial *OH* articles, he reveled in the provocative approach that he took and the reaction to it. This is summarized in his ‘ID’ from the 1st of March 1949, essentially ignored in both biography and criticism of Brown, titled ‘The Delights of Being Abused,’ which charts Brown’s reactions to those who took exception to his divisive opinions. Brown writes that ‘to begin with, such strictures hurt me bitterly.’¹⁷⁵ He then goes on to give examples from the increasing number of letters that took issue with both him and his approach:

‘the epithets piled up and increased in variety. I read that I was “a fool”, “a half-wit”, “a perverter of innocent youth,” “a disgrace to Orkney,” “a filthy-minded blackguard,” “an iconoclast,” “a candidate for Morningside.”’¹⁷⁶

In a paragraph titled ‘Growing Delight,’¹⁷⁷ he then describes, in a somewhat outlandish fashion, the pleasure that he extracts from the vitriol he receives:

I kept them locked up in a drawer and I treasured every new addition to the collection [...]. Whenever I felt low and sad, I would steal to this drawer, slip in the key, and wrench it open. Then, for hours I would linger lovingly over every sentence on my tongue with secret delight, extracting the full flavour from every vile adjective and thunderous noun. Then, carefully, I would stow the letters back in their drawer, and go about my nosiness refreshed and clear-headed and sprightly of soul.¹⁷⁸

This article, and this quote in particular, goes some way in highlighting an area of significance regarding Brown’s early journalism – the derogatory nature of readers’

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ George Mackay Brown, Pseudonym: Islandman, ‘ID: The Delights of Being Abused’, *OH*, 1st March 1949, p.5.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

correspondence to him is not what gives him joy; rather, it's the fact that his readers are engaging and taking him seriously. The *OH* offered Brown his first audience of any real substance, and the paper even has a reach beyond Orkney: Brown notes that Orcadian exiles the world over took umbrage to his comments.

The article draws to a conclusion with Brown describing how, during a clear-out, he accidentally disposed of the pile of correspondence he had collected:

Into the roaring bonfires which consumed all the rubbish went, inadvertently, my Anthology of Personal Abuse. Never again will those heart-felt missives [...] gladden my eyes. Never again will I roll their eloquent thunders on my tongue. Never again will I fan my dropping spirits with such gales of outraged fury.¹⁷⁹

Brown sees these letters as vindication of his importance. He then states that 'unaccountably, the letters of abuse have fallen off to hardly anything at all. It is most discouraging and disappointing.'¹⁸⁰ It is not 'unaccountable' as to why this happened. Rather, it is proof that Brown's articles generally become more passive and uncontroversial around this time.

Until now, focus on Brown's disagreements with readers of the *OH* has almost exclusively concentrated on a feud between Brown and 'Islandwoman.'¹⁸¹ The argument began in the *OH* on May 28th 1946 when a writer, who signs herself as 'Islandwoman' takes exception to some of Brown's views on Orkney and makes negative, and at times provocative, comments regarding the islands:

I am amazed at the flood of tumultuous feeling obviously filling your heart towards this bare, bleak treeless island and its, generally speaking, monotonous and unimaginative people. You love it.¹⁸²

This is fairly typical of a letter that attacks the perceived lack of beauty, visually or artistically, that 'Islandwoman' believes that Orkney suffers from. It is worth noting

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Despite some research, efforts to discover the real identity of 'Islandwoman' were inconclusive.

¹⁸² Islandwoman, 'How about it, Island Man?' *OH*, 28th May 1946, p.7.

that the *OH* is keen to stoke the flames of this debate,¹⁸³ and solely dedicates the ‘Opinion’ column the week following Islandwoman’s letter to the debate, throwing weight behind Orkney and Brown:

Islandwoman has thrown out a challenge which Orkney folk everywhere will feel duty bound to accept. We have left it to our column-writer ‘Islandman’ at whom the challenge was mainly levelled – to reply on our behalf. [...] Nevertheless, we are certain that Islandwoman is grossly biased against us. It is the sign of limited intellect, and has not allowed the precious Orkney influence into her being. It is her own grievous loss.¹⁸⁴

This is a striking editorial. Brown, according to this article, is replying on the ‘behalf’ of ‘Orkney folk everywhere’. Brown, and the *OH*, have positioned him as the defender of Orkney and champion of their values and artistic merits. This is particularly surprising given what has previously been asserted regarding Brown’s early journalism. For example, Brian Murray states that Brown had chosen to develop the theme ‘Orkney has no culture’ in his early Island Diaries. Murray evidences this with Brown’s assertion in an ID in 1948 that

I still believe that the Orkney people lack the creative vision without which no community can really be alive, and I will keep on believing it until it is proved to the contrary.¹⁸⁵

Brown’s belief in the ‘lack of creative vision’ that Orkney had may not be considered surprising considering recent biographical study. In *The Wound and the Gift*, Ron Ferguson discusses a previously unpublished poem of Brown’s from 1944 that mirrors this view:

There are no forests in Orkney;
Only, blossoming in storms,
The dark swaying broughs of the sea.

¹⁸³ This may well have been successful – the introduction to Brown’s reply to ‘Islandwoman’s letter notes that her ‘letter caused some stir among the people of the islands.’

Anon, ‘Islandman Replies’, *OH*, June 4th 1946, p.7.

¹⁸⁴ Anon, ‘Opinion’, *OH*, 4th June 1946, p.4.

¹⁸⁵ George Mackay Brown, ‘ID: History of a Column’, *OH*, 2nd November 1948, p.4.

There are no trains in Orkney;
Only great winds roaring through the land
From the beginning to the end of eternity.

There is no respectability in Orkney;
Only what the blood dictates
Is done. Spirit and mind are free.

And there are no poets in Orkney.
Stirred by the breeze and blood and ocean
I set the trumpet to my lips. I only.¹⁸⁶

Here, Brown is announcing himself as an artistic salvation to Orkney. In achieving this, the reader does not see the subtlety of Brown's later writing: this is also in keeping with the explicit nature of the articles discussed in chapter one, which were written around the time of this poem. Brown's debate with 'Islandwoman' shows us that, during this time, Brown is developing the appreciating and understanding of his native islands that would underpin the rest of his literary career.

Brown replies to Islandwoman the following week and lists the admirable aspects of Orkney; from the Sagas to Orkney ale. He concludes his reply by writing that

You have wasted 21 years of your life ['Islandwoman' had previously stated that she had lived on Orkney for 21 years], Islandwoman. In the midst of incredible beauty, you have been blind. It is time you had your eyes open, and I will be only too glad to perform the operation, absolutely free of charge. I believe, if only you will submit to my influence, that I could make a better woman of you.¹⁸⁷

Brown's confidence is apparent, and this quote is typical of the vitriolic to and fro that develops between the two on an almost weekly basis, concluding on the 16th of July. The debate did gather some attention, with a letter to the *OH* on June 15th stating 'with regard to the dispute between "Islandwoman" and "Islandman" and which is already embroiling our friends from the – to me – wrong side of the Pentland Firth, may I say that – 'we are a' Jock Tamson's bairns.'¹⁸⁸ This appeal for solidarity is

¹⁸⁶ Ferguson, *The Wound and the Gift*, p.21.

¹⁸⁷ George Mackay Brown, 'Pseudonym – Islandman', 'Islandman Replies', *OH*, 4th June, 1946, p.7.

¹⁸⁸ Pax, 'Islandman and Islandwoman', *OH*, 25th June 1946, p.5.

ignored, however, and Brown and Islandwoman continue to engage in a debate that, at times, is pre-occupied with personal point-scoring.

As the debate rumbled on, one may think, considering Brown's opinions referred to in 1944 and 1948, that Brown and 'Islandwoman' shared some common ground. For example, 'Islandwoman' writes of a 'childhood memory' of

describing in a school jotter all the beautiful things she had seen on her way to school. [...] she had managed to cover three pages while her classmates, Orcadians all, had not written six lines each. They had seen nothing to write about. To them, there had been no beauty in a newly-ploughed field sloping like bars of chocolate towards the creaming foaming milk of the sea.¹⁸⁹

Brown's debate with 'Islandwoman' occurred in the summer of 1946, two years before Brown wrote that Orcadians 'lack creative vision.' In one of the final installments of Brown's argument with 'Islandwoman', he replies to what he perceives to be an attack on Orcadian culture:

We have now reduced the scope of your complaint to the inhabitants of Orkney, at whom your gorge rises. They are, you say, stupid and degenerate and unappreciative of the beauties around them. But you have not yet explained the remarkable phenomenon of Kirkwall's twenty professors, which I think disposes of your charge of stupidity. Neither, it seems, have you taken the trouble to see Stanley Cursiter's fine Orkney pictures, or to read the closing pages of Whitemaa's Saga, in which our Eric Linklater describes in superb language a summer dawn in Orkney. And if you have not read Orkney poems of Edwin Muir, and his account of his childhood in Wyre [...] you as a naturalized Orcadian have missed a great experience.

There are some possible reasons as to why Brown contradicted himself in print in this way. It is suggested that, from writing that 'there are no poets in Orkney',¹⁹⁰ two years before this, Brown has discovered and appreciated a range of Orkney literature that he may not have substantially engaged with previously.¹⁹¹ Though Brown may have

¹⁸⁹ 'Islandwoman', 'Reply to Islandman', *OH*, 18th June 1946, p.7.

¹⁹⁰ See unpublished poem by Brown that is discussed on page 68.

¹⁹¹ Between 1945 and 1949, Brown wrote gushing reviews of several works of Orcadian literature in his 'Bookshelf' feature for the *OH*. According to Brown, *The*

recognised the skill of this work, he may not have acknowledged its communal importance: Brown may have considered it work of value but not of the level to keep the community 'alive'. What we do know from this response to 'Islandwoman' is that it is around this time that Brown's exposure to Orcadian literature is beginning to impact on his contemporary thought: Brown is considering, perhaps for the first time, how Orcadian stories can be used in contemporary times.

In his perceived defence of his own (and perhaps, in Brown's eyes, the Orcadian) position, Brown writes of his own 'dual personality' that he has developed in print:

As for this "dual-personality" you so persistently dangle before my eyes, allow me to assure you that I have been aware of it for a very long time indeed. If you had read my weekly column with attention, it might have struck you that Orkney's "dual-personality" was, week after week, the themes of my musings. Nobody knows better than I do the intense love which the Orcadian bears towards his native soil. They spring passionately to defend it if it is attacked by the stranger. And yet their age-old institutions mean little or nothing to them; they see them slipping away without a qualm. That is the "dual-personality". If there was anything at all constructive in your mind, "Islandwoman," you would try to try to help me in my weary efforts to effect a union of irreconcilables, instead of standing aside and complaining at your own isolation.¹⁹²

This does not fit with accepted thought on Brown's early years in journalism. Both Ron Ferguson and Maggie Fergusson assert that Brown was, at this point, a rather irritable and disaffected young man. Indeed, Maggie Fergusson comments that 'for anyone who knew George in later life – tactful, careful not to offend, shy, almost to a

Orkneyinga Saga is a 'work of astonishing and variety and richness', Eric Linklater is a 'master in the art of narration' and though 'Robert Rendall's *Country Sonnets* has not yet had to stand the test of time', Brown states that he is 'prepared to wager everything I possess, my very name and reputation, that this small sheaf of poems will still be read with delight a century after the bones of this generation are mouldering in the dust.' After his announcement in 1944 that 'there are no poets in Orkney', Brown shows in his 'Bookshelf' columns that follow that he is beginning to learn about (and appreciate) the literary history of Orkney.

George Mackay Brown, 'ID', Pseudonym: Islandman, *OH*, 22nd February 1949, p.5.

¹⁹² George Mackay Brown, 'Islandwoman Psycho-Analysed: A Lady's Mind Fully Exposed!', *The OH*, 9th July 1946, p.7.

fault, of confrontation – these pieces strike an unfamiliar note.’¹⁹³ Discussion of Brown’s battle with ‘Islandwoman’ does not dispute this. However, these articles are more telling and significant than informing us about his character. Brown is not simply angry: rather, he acknowledges that his ‘dual personality’ is the result of deeply considered frustration with Orkney and Orcadians. For many, Brown feels that ‘their age-old institutions mean little or nothing to them.’ This does not simply apply to buildings or history – Brown sees ancient traditions of communal responsibility and working together as something to protect. Thus, with ‘ID’, we do not see the angry musings of a man on the edge of society, but the birth of Brown’s ‘cultural mission,’¹⁹⁴ in which his ultimate answer is to re-work old stories and cultural traditions for a modern audience.

Study of further articles, hitherto completely disregarded by critics, reveals a wider perspective of Brown’s attitudes, defined not simply by personal quarrels. As is clear from Chapter Two, Brown views the Orcadian ‘establishment’ with a variation of suspicion and disdain. ‘Islandwoman’ was not his only critic,¹⁹⁵ as illustrated by his article of 23rd July 1946:

Why is it, dearly beloved readers of ‘ID’, that all mentally debauched people of the islands swarm round to vent their spleen on me, like nasty little dogs around a lamppost?¹⁹⁶

Brown continues

Like nasty little dogs, too, they keep on barking long after they have been put in their place. And that is not all. Their frantic yelping induces even nastier dogs to slink from their holes and join the uproar.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ Fergusson, *The Life*, p. 78.

¹⁹⁴ Murray and Murray, *Interrogation*, p.33.

¹⁹⁵ Letters to the Editor to challenge Brown appear to be so regular that, when one from D.R. Linklater is published in 1947, it is printed under the heading ‘“Islandman” Under Fire Again’.

Anon, ‘Letters to the Editor’, *OH*, 23rd December 1947, p.6.

¹⁹⁶ George Mackay Brown, Pseudonym: Islandman, ‘ID’, *OH*, 23rd July 1946, p.7.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

Brown's derision for his critics is not only present through collective description. Here, a reader called John B. J. Laurenson is the recipient of Brown's ire, which is delivered in a similar way to his debacle with 'Islandwoman'. In this case there are more insightful, significant points to be made beneath the surface of vitriolic debate. John B.J. Laurenson has written to the *OH* to take issue with Brown and his readership. Brown responds:

John B.J.L. is right, of course, when he implies that I attribute some intelligence to my readers. This diary is not for half-wits, quarter-wits or even witless people. I am not surprised when they find it boring.¹⁹⁸

This is more evidence of Brown embarking on his 'cultural mission', positioning his writing as being informative yet primarily for the informed. In a similar manner to 'Think Before You Vote', Brown is attempting to alter thinking on a range of issues. Though Brown states that he does not want to 'bore' his readers with discussion of John B.J.L, he goes on to write that

He must be a very mediocre person, for to tell the truth I have never heard of him. He probably has a nice little job in Kirkwall, and returns home a little tired every evening to warm his weary toes at the fire. He is, I wager you, immensely respectable, and his little soul is shocked beyond words at any extraordinary thing I may happen to say from time to time in this Diary. Very likely he goes to church twice on Sunday, and weeds his tiny plots on weeknights. He has probably been as far as Aberdeen on the North boat, and thinks himself a great traveller. He reads Sir Walter Scott, the "*OH*" and the "News of the World," and is probably shocked at Picasso. Very likely God will make an end of him round about the age of 70 and after that I don't know what will happen to him.¹⁹⁹

This is not just an attack on John B.J.L; it is an attack on what Brown perceives the establishment to be and what he believes it to include. When studying this extract, it is important to remember that, at the time this article was written, Brown was a 25 year-old man who had, for a number of reasons, not been able to successfully hold down a job for a substantial length of time. Brown is aware of this, but does not necessarily see it as a negative. He sarcastically refers to the imagined comfort of John B.J.L's

¹⁹⁸ George Mackay Brown, 'ID', *OH*, 23rd July 1946, p.7.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

life by describing his ‘nice little job’ that leaves him ‘a little tired’ in the evening. Brown does not view this perceived security in a good light: to him, it is tedious and predictable.

Brown’s imagined description of John B.J.L. gives us an extremely early example of his politics linking to his fiction: his description of John B.J.L. is fiction within a non-fiction piece. He imagines the comfort of his character due to his perceived standing in the community and makes stereotypical assumptions accordingly, personifying the middle class in a contemptuous manner. Sabine Schmid states that

by creating an Orkney of his own mind, a spiritual centre that allowed him to see facts as they bear relevance for humanity, Brown found a place for himself that was in a way out of time and space and defied traditional categorisation. He constructed a synthetic account of Orkney and of life in general by exploiting the multiplicity of its appearances through time and through various characters.²⁰⁰

If we take this small example of Brown imagining John B.J.L.’s life, we see that it is not just a ‘spiritual centre’ that enabled Brown to position his creative outlook, but a centre that was also informed by political concerns. The connotations that Brown applies to this person’s life are not dis-similar to the associations made of his more developed, fictional characters, for example the Laird in ‘Tithonus’, who will be discussed in Chapter Three.

‘Only Politics have been Mentioned’²⁰¹ – Moving Yet Maintaining the Political Paradigm

On the 21st of March 1950, Brown’s ‘ID’ was published with the sub-heading ‘Letter to a Hot Country’, in the form of a letter to an Orcadian exile named Willie. Brown seems to have known Willie personally, commenting on the letter’s recipient spending three years living in the Far East and Brown giving him ‘a farewell hand on

²⁰⁰ Schmid, *Keeping the Sources Pure*, p.28.

²⁰¹ George Mackay Brown, ‘ID: Letter to a Hot Country’, *The OH*, 21st March 1950, p.4.

the Kirkwall Pier.’²⁰² After addressing him, Brown writes ‘what then, is new in Orkney?’²⁰³

What follows is a report on the recent election of Jo Grimond for the Liberals in the 1950 General Election. Brown states that he knows that Willie’s ‘sympathies lie with the Liberals’ and seems to take some pleasure in informing Willie of their recent victory in the Orkney and Shetland constituency:

They say Liberalism is old and grey and full of sleep; but these Orkney Liberals were as bright and enthusiastic as converts to a burning faith. In comparison, the Conservative and Labour organisations were feeble flickers. The work the Liberals did in this constituency paid good dividends. Though I’m no Liberal myself, I admired them for their great fight.²⁰⁴

This underlines the growth of Brown’s political maturity from 1945. Though not agreeing with different viewpoints, Brown displays the courtesy of recognizing value in certain political fights - this is also present when he reviews the Conservative poll; rather than gloating, Brown ponders what their ‘static’ result means (the Liberals gained the seat after a swing from the Labour vote – the Conservative vote stayed roughly the same from 1945). He wonders if ‘an unchanging poll means stultification and a fatal hardening of political arteries.’²⁰⁵ With the shift in tone, Brown’s political thinking deepened.

Brown goes on to reflect on possible reasons for the slump in Labour votes. He views the Labour campaign as lacklustre, writing that ‘Labour’s failure in the islands was due to organisation that was only middling. The faith that, once upon a time, inspired Keir Hardie and the wild men from Clydeside was, to put it mildly, lacking.’²⁰⁶

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ George Mackay Brown, ‘ID: Letter to a Hot Country’, *The OH*, 21st March 1950, p.4.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

Brown concludes his political musings by writing that ‘the signs are that Mr Grimond will be our M.P. for long enough.’²⁰⁷ Time would prove him to be correct.²⁰⁸

The article’s importance crystalizes in its closing paragraph, where Brown states that

The letter draws to a close. Only politics have been mentioned. I can hear you cursing under your mosquito net that this is not what you expected to hear from your friend in Orkney.²⁰⁹

This is the signpost for change in Brown’s approach to his local journalism. From this point on, though politics is still sporadically present, Brown never truly grapples with political issues as explicitly as he does before his departure for Newbattle in 1951.

There are several reasons for this: his remit with the *OH* changed; Brown’s move to Edinburgh put both literal and metaphorical distance between him and debate in Orkney; and finally Brown’s health also made publications more unpredictable. Most likely, however, is that, at this point, he is beginning to hone his craft in creative writing, both in fiction and in poetry – Brian Murray states that, after a period in which he was publishing lots of journalism and little creative work:

From this point on, the balance was to tip the other way. Although he continued to write prolifically for the Orkney newspapers, Brown’s main impulse was now creative writing. [he] badly needed change. His journalism was prolific and constant up to 1951, but it was no longer satisfying.²¹⁰

Study at Newbattle offered him this change, and it is one that he gratefully grasped. It is widely accepted that Brown’s time at Newbattle was vital in honing his skill as a writer.²¹¹ Interestingly, Schmid acknowledges, however, that Newbattle was not the starting point for the themes that Brown would go on to explore:

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Grimond was the Member of Parliament for Orkney and Shetland from 1950 until 1983, as well as the Leader of the Liberal Party between 1956 and 1967. Peter Barberis, *Liberal Lion: Jo Grimond, A Political Life* (London: I.B Tauris, 2005).

²⁰⁹ George Mackay Brown, ‘ID: Letter to a Hot Country’, *The OH*, 21st March 1950, p.4.

²¹⁰ Murray and Murray, *Interrogation*, p.44.

²¹¹ Schmid, *Keeping the Sources Pure*, p.49.

The poems [...] written between 1942 and 1952 clearly indicate that he had by then settled his mind on certain subjects and ideas (especially religious, historical and mythological themes) long before he took up a course at Newbattle.²¹²

It is worth noting that Schmid does not mention politics or social concerns amongst the three specified areas of interest that Brown held. This thesis does not wish to dispute the three areas that Schmid does mention – the afore-mentioned ‘Prayer to Magnus’ highlights Brown’s early religious concerns – but does wish to offer consideration of Brown’s politics. For example, alongside ‘Prayer to Magnus’ in a 1947 *New Shetlander* is another poem by Brown titled ‘Worker’s Chant’, which has remained uncollected and unpublished since this original publication. It is worth quoting the poem in full to highlight how, even at this early stage of his writing career, Brown’s societal concerns can be found in his creative work as well as his journalism:

A tattered rag
a blink of fire
a reluctant coin
a roofless shanty
a stunted life
a long gray death –
all the poor man has.

But he will have
an urgent desire
leaping red with his blood,
an ancient passion
thundering from his heart,
a will of iron
to wield like a club.

When flags flutter peace
and soldiers return
then we will see
the reluctant coin flung
in the giver’s face,
the roofless shanty
sprouting with guns,
the tattered rag
dyed with red freedom,

²¹² Ibid.

the blink of fire
inflaming men's souls.
Then we will see
that the stunted life
is a towering song
and the long gray death
a victorious doom.
Then we will see
the poor man astride the
world as a conquerer
and slavery dumb in the wind.²¹³

Evidently, societal constructions, and the politics that provides this framework, are a subject that Brown is interested in before his departure to Newbattle. Chapter Four will discuss how, though in a different form, the political attitudes that Brown articulates in his journalism between 1945 and 1951 can also be found in the short fiction that follows.

²¹³ George Mackay Brown, 'Worker's Chant', *The New Shetlander*, 6 (1947), p.3.

Chapter Four – ‘All Things Wear Now to a Common Soiling’²¹⁴ – Placing Brown’s Politics within his Short Fiction

Ten years after starting his position at the *OH* in 1944, Brown’s first collection of poetry, *The Storm*, was published with moderate success. With Brown’s reputation as a poet then consolidated over the following decade, his first collection of short stories, *A Calendar of Love*, was published in 1967. From then until 1996, Brown published some nine collections of short stories, with their legacy still strongly being felt in modern-day Scotland.²¹⁵

The critical success of his novels, particularly *Greenvoe* (1972), after making his name as a poet, has led to a sometimes-awkward positioning and understanding of his fictive prose. Ron Ferguson has stated that

George Mackay Brown took up writing short stories because he needed money. His career as a schoolteacher was over before it started. Physical work was out. Poetry paid poorly. To make a living as a writer, he would have to produce material that would pay better.²¹⁶

Though money was a motivation for Brown, he had in fact been writing short stories for a long time before his first collection in 1967.²¹⁷ It is more plausible that Brown’s success as a poet brought trust from publishers to have some of his wealth of short stories published. Moreover, they share much of their thematic content with his

²¹⁴ Brown, ‘Hamnavoe’, p.24.

²¹⁵ In 2013, the Scottish Qualifications Authority announced that six of Brown’s short stories would be included in the prescribed list of fiction in the Scottish Set Text list for Higher English, sparking a renewed wave of interest in Brown’s short fiction. Following this, Linden Bicket’s study guide, *The Short Stories of George Mackay Brown* was published in 2014.

²¹⁶ Ferguson, *The Wound and the Gift*, p.184.

²¹⁷ Brown had a number of short stories published in periodicals before any collection. For example, ‘Journey to Avilion’ (1949), ‘The Three Sons’, ‘The Day the Vikings Came’ (1950) and ‘Death of Poets’ (1951) appeared in *The New Shetlander*. His stories also appeared in *Lines Review* on a number of occasions in the sixties: ‘The Fight at Greenay’ (1962), ‘How the Sabistons Came to Orkney’ (1963) and ‘Pilgrim’ (1968), amongst others.

Osamu Yamada, Hilda D. Spear and David S. Robb, eds., *The Contribution to Literature of Orcadian Writer George Mackay Brown* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991).

poetry. Timothy Baker has asserted that ‘Brown’s engagement with the problems of community is best seen in his prose works,’²¹⁸ and, given the length of this study, short stories provide the most suitable outlet of exploration as to how Brown’s politics translates to his work: they give Brown the scope to interrogate the fabric of community and, consequently, the reader an insight into the prominence of his politics.

This chapter aims to illustrate that the political concerns that Brown outlined in his journalistic writing, particularly that discussed in Chapter Two, can also be found in his fiction. A concern regarding societal inequality, the impact of lairds and landlords and the irregular social structures that this creates, all issues underpinning Brown’s political opinions, will be examined through close reading of a number of short stories. This chapter will examine ‘WR’ and ‘TK’ from the early collection *TK* (1967) and ‘Tithonus’ from *Hawkfall* (1974), stories which, as well as being some of Brown’s best-known stories, are suitable in terms of illustrating political themes while also being generally representative of his common literary concerns. In order to consolidate points and underline the far-reaching presence of particular themes within Brown’s work, other stories will also be referred to: ‘Silver’ and ‘The Laird’s Son’, both taken from Brown’s 1995 collection ‘*Winter Tales*’ and ‘The Wireless Set’, also taken from *TK*.

Though, at times, Brown’s early journalistic rants are deeply divisive and perhaps naïve, they are nonetheless the writings of a man who has firm convictions of the way the world *should* be. In discussing his short stories, Linden Bicket states that

Violence and hardship are part of the human experience, and as such Brown cannot ignore these things. To evade this part of life would be to deny reality, and so often we see his characters in difficult, lonely or trying circumstances.²¹⁹

In analyzing a selection of Brown’s stories, it will become apparent that the ‘hardship’ that Brown portrays is, though part of the ‘human experience’, often

²¹⁸ Baker, *Philosophy of Community*, p.4.

²¹⁹ Linden Bicket, *The Short Stories of George Mackay Brown* (Glasgow: ASLS, 2014) p.7.

artificially created by it: whereas Brown's characters regularly encounter unavoidable difficulties from famines to storms, there are often demanding situations that are perpetrated by decisions made by the people. Brown's preoccupation with the balance of power within communities is omnipresent in his work both journalistic and creative.

Power in Society

In his journalism, Brown identifies where he perceives power to lie in local and national political paradigms: notably in the hands of a select group of people, or an establishment. In his early journalism, for example, Brown tends to group together the different strands of the establishment under the umbrella of the Conservative Party, writing in 1944 that 'the Tory party is originally the party of the aristocracy and the high Church.'²²⁰ He also tends to associate these sections of society with a sense of otherness that does not take root in Orkney:

Toryism is, in Orkney and Shetland, foreign to our island spirit and island traditions. The Tory Party, the party, at one time, of the landed gentry, and today of the wealthy industrialists, has no roots in our Orcadian soil, which has since time immemorial has been the home of freedom and adventure.²²¹

Brown is not alone amongst twentieth century Scottish writers in this view. Margery McCulloch notes that Neil Gunn employs an 'overarching theme of the search for the sources of historical decline in an attempt to build a more successful future and his choice of key periods of loss and regeneration of Highland history for his settings.'²²² For Gunn, the source of deterioration in his Highland novels is often found in a similar form of 'establishment', commonly landowners and businessmen. Such 'establishment' also has a public presence, perhaps in terms of a big house overlooking a village or a rent-collecting factor, features that are also present in the work of Iain Crichton Smith. The presence of an 'establishment' is not confined, in

²²⁰ George Mackay Brown, 'The Downward Trend of the Tory Party', *OH*, November 28th 1944, p.6.

²²¹ George Mackay Brown, 'Toryism Means Destruction', *OH*, June 26th 1945, p.2.

²²² Margery Palmer McCulloch, *Scottish Modernism and its Contexts 1918-59* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009) p.116.

political terms, to specific time frames of Scottish literature: recently, it has been stated that ‘in his own fiction [James] Kelman confronts a bureaucratic state power that is extremely difficult to comprehend and resist due to the discrepancy between the presence of the lived, daily grind of its effects and the absence of the locus and source of its vast systematic reach.’²²³ In Kelman’s work, the ‘establishment’ is often physically invisible yet all encompassing, subconsciously puppeteering characters.

In Brown’s short stories, the reader is presented with a view of the establishment that is not dissimilar to that of Neil Gunn²²⁴ or even James Kelman. Brown’s short story ‘Tithonus’ comprises a collection of diary entries from the laird of the fictional island of Torsay. Early in the story, the laird introduces himself:

I suppose that emotionally I am a kind of neutral person, in the sense that I attract neither very much love nor very much dislike. It is eight years that I arrived from London to live in the island that my grand-uncle, the laird of Torsay, a man I had never seen in my life, left to me. On the slope behind the village with its pier and shop and church is The Hall – the laird’s residence – that was built in the late-seventeenth century, a large elegant house with eighteen rooms, a garden, and a stable.²²⁵

Immediately, there are aspects of this fictional island laird’s life that are similar to Brown’s opinions of the landowning aristocracy that are included in his early journalism. In ‘Why Toryism Must Fail’, Brown writes that ‘there are, as far as I know, no persons of aristocratic descent in these islands.’²²⁶ In ‘Tithonus’ (1974), the laird is from London and the inheritance of the island from a great-uncle whom he had ‘never seen’ further encapsulates Brown’s preconceptions about the aristocracy that are articulated in his previously discussed journalism: the landowners are disconnected from the community that they abide over.

²²³ Aaron Kelly, ‘James Kelman and the Deterritorialisation of Power’ in *The Edinburgh Companion to Modern Scottish Literature* ed. by Berthold Schoene (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007) p.178.

²²⁴ Brown engaged extensively with Gunn’s work over a vast period of time. He recalled how his ‘hands trembled’ as he took Gunn’s ‘Morning Tide’ down from a shelf in Stromness as a young man. Later, Gunn visited Newbattle and gave a talk to Brown and his peers.

Fergusson, *The Life*, p.41, 108.

²²⁵ George Mackay Brown, ‘Tithonus’ in *Hawkfall and Other Stories* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2004) p.51.

²²⁶ Brown, ‘Why Toryism Must Fail’, p.6.

Timothy Baker discusses the idea of ‘the island as a microcosmic and knowable society.’²²⁷ In doing so, he refers to the island as a constant that offers a window to the wider world:

For Brown, the island can be seen as a place of individual and collective renewal: the island is where the individual meets the universal. For [Iain Crichton] Smith and Brown, islands become a place where abstract notions such as time and community are actualized and inhabited.²²⁸

With the Laird moving into his great-uncle’s former residency, literally connecting him with a people and place that he has no previous substantial connection, we see that it is ‘the establishment’ that is the driver of the ‘collective renewal’ that Baker discusses. It is not the Laird himself who is important; it is the presence of the foreboding building that the Laird (whoever he may be) inhabits and its physical imposition on the islanders.

The separation between the landowning establishment and the islanders is not only physical. In ‘Tithonus’, the laird has no true friends on the island, despite having been there for eight years. Signaling his isolation, the laird states that ‘if I do have a friend, I suppose he must be James MacIntosh who came to be the schoolmaster in the village two years ago.’ It is important that the only connection of any real substance that the laird has on the island is with a character that also stands at the top of the community’s social pyramid. While courteous nods are exchanged between all islanders, a gulf in social class often prevents meaningful relationships from being made. The laird is aware of this, even with his relationship with the respected, educated MacIntosh:

There is a curious shifting between us, sometimes cordial, sometimes veiled and hostile. He becomes aware from time to time of the social gulf between us, and it is on these occasions that he

²²⁷ Timothy C. Baker, ‘The Lonely Island: Exile and Community in Recent Island Writing’ in *Community in Scottish Literature*, ed. by Scott Lyall (Brill-Rodopi: Leiden, 2016) p.27.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.28.

says and does things to humble me – I must learn that we are living now in the age of equality.²²⁹

Early in the story, this acts as a soliloquy, verbalizing the thought process of the laird. As it is the Laird himself who makes the decision that he ‘must learn that we are living now in the age of equality’, one suspects that this only underlines that the laird believes he should learn no such thing – events in the narrative from this point suggest that there is no equality whatsoever. The use of ‘we’ within this passage offers a parallel with Brown’s journalism where the use of ‘we’ is frequently used to connect his readership with their Orcadian past. In ‘Tithonus’, ‘we’ is used to create solidarity and connection between characters and readers alike. However, this is an enforced conscription – The Laird knows that he and MacIntosh are not actually equal at all, but that the façade of equality should help him maintain his superiority by negating resistance. This has been identified as a key tactic of groups who want to preserve power. In *The Establishment* (2014), Owen Jones describes how ‘defenders of the British Establishment preach a doctrine of rampant individualism, yet they are often impressively disciplined about working together as a collective group with shared goals.’²³⁰ In both Brown’s journalism and his fiction, personal pronouns are used to highlight social divisions. In addition to this, the reader is exposed to more obvious methods of societal division within Brown’s short fiction. When a character arrives on an island, divisions are regularly evident. While the example of the Laird in ‘Tithonus’ has been discussed, another example takes place in ‘Silver’. When the narrator wishes to visit Muckle Glebe, which Brown describes as a ‘big farm’²³¹, the island shopkeeper informs the narrator

Muck Glebe. The Taings – a proud lot. O, very hoity-toity – you would think they were gentry, or something. Let me tell you, they have their faults and failings like everyone else.²³²

It is not simply those at the top of the social scale who are aware of this gulf; these roots of division are acknowledged throughout the community. By representing the laird in ‘Tithonus’ as a character who is aware of the ‘social gulf’ that exists in

²²⁹ Brown, ‘Tithonus’, p.52.

²³⁰ Owen Jones, *The Establishment* (London: Penguin Books, 2014) p.303.

²³¹ George Mackay Brown, ‘Silver’ in *The Sun’s Net* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2010) p.32.

²³² Ibid.

society and giving him the power as to whether he should abide by this rigid structure or not, Brown underlines the separate social power of the establishment. If the laird was actually living in 'the age of equality', the distance between himself and other characters would not be as pertinent; the fact that even the schoolmaster cannot make a meaningful friendship with the laird further highlights the social distance between the establishment and the islanders.

This distance leads to a lack of understanding, which can result in a lack of respect between certain characters. Partly because of the physical and emotional isolation between himself and the islanders, the laird has no real understanding of their lives and how they operate. There are times when this misunderstanding becomes almost neglectful. This is not confined to the laird. For example, the laird and Macintosh's main past-time together is playing chess (that they play chess together in their respective houses while the islanders drink in the pub reiterates their isolation). The two characters playing chess may be seen as being symbolic in itself; it is possible that Brown is making a broader point with the two characters of an elevated social status indulging in a manipulative game of one-upsmanship. When they are in the middle of a match, MacIntosh asks the laird:

Would you please not drop your ash on the mat? (There's an ash tray). I'm not like some folk. I can't afford to buy a new mat every month. Mrs Baillie asked me to mention it to you.²³³

Rather than apologise, the laird thinks to himself 'my pipe and his dog cancel each other out. Mrs Baillie is his housekeeper.'²³⁴

Firstly, the laird's assumption that freely dropping his ash in MacIntosh's house is acceptable shows a lack of understanding regarding the lives of other characters: the laird does not think of the financial situation of Macintosh, nor of the inconvenience of Mrs Baillie. Perhaps by ignoring the provided ash tray, the laird is deliberately placing himself outside (above) the established rules for other guests. This episode reiterates the laird's delusion of equality that he remarked upon earlier in his diary.

The chess match concludes with a victory for MacIntosh. The laird writes that

²³³ Brown, 'Tithonus', p.53.

²³⁴ Ibid., p.52.

Victory always makes him reckless and generous. 'Smoke, man, smoke in here any time you like. To hell with Mrs Baillie. Get your pipe out. I'll sweep any ash up myself.'²³⁵

This is an interesting reaction from MacIntosh. He is more concerned with pleasing the laird, a man with little regard for his property, than his loyal housekeeper. It is possible that Brown is using this small incident to represent a wider issue in terms of the social demographic of the island: that those of lower social class are preoccupied with climbing the ladder themselves rather than helping those below them, in this case Mrs Baillie. In this story, as in many of his political articles²³⁶, Brown leads the reader to sympathise with those of lower social status.

In his journalism, there is often an emphasis on memory and traditional associations when Brown is disclosing particular political opinions. His opinions on political parties are not wholly formed in the run up to an election: rather his political decisions are informed by what he perceives a party's role in history:

The history of the Tory Party can be anything but proud. A blacker and more painful record it would be hard to parallel, even among the dossiers of Scotland Yard. It has opposed every forward movement in history. Everything that threatened to bring the smallest degree of happiness to the lower orders, it has strenuously objected to.²³⁷

Brown's personal view here is then woven directly into his fiction. For example, in 'Tithonus', Mansie suffers a nasty bite from the Laird's dog. The Laird asks Mansie to come into his house to get bandaged up. Mansie refuses:

He shook his head. 'It's the principle of it,' said Mansie. You oppressed my ancestors. You taxed them to death. You drove them to Canada and New Zealand. You made them work in your fields for nothing. They built this house for you, yes, and their hands were red from carrying up stones from the short. I wouldn't go through your door for a pension. What does one man want with a big house

²³⁵ Ibid., p.53.

²³⁶ Such as 'Why Toryism Must Fail', 'The Downward Trend of the Tory Party' and 'Toryism Equals Destruction'.

²³⁷ George Mackay Brown, 'The Downward Trend of the Tory Party', *OH*, November 28th 1944, p.6.

like this anyway? Thora and me and my brothers live in two small rooms up at Solsetter.’²³⁸

Mansie’s dislike of the Laird is not necessarily personal. He does not have a particular dislike for aspects of the Laird’s character. Rather, he hates what he perceives the Laird stands for: he identifies the Laird and his family as the oppressors, not of a particular moment but over generations. This idea is also present in ‘The Laird’s Son’ (1989), in which the Laird is ‘taken ill in the parliament’²³⁹ (a clear connection between the aristocracy and political power), leaving his son to travel north to Shetland. The Laird’s son visits some of the houses to try to build a relationship with the islanders. However, he recounts that

In a certain poor house – two middle-aged brothers lived in it and a pale mute sister – one of her brothers, after the civil introduction, turned on me and said coldly that the lairds had been done ill by the people, and had waxed rich over many generations on the hard labour of the islanders on land and sea. ‘And now look at us,’ said he, ‘not fit for work, dependent on the good folk round about for bread and milk and fish.’²⁴⁰

Additionally, in ‘A Winter Tale’ (1976), the islanders are described as keeping ‘some kind of ancestral memory of the bad rule of the lairds, and so Toryism is out.’²⁴¹ Like Mansie in ‘Tithonus’, these characters associate the landowning establishment with certain social failures, much as Brown has done in his early journalism. For example, he generalizes that ‘Neven-Spence calls himself a Unionist, but under Toryism we have had little union except with poverty, want, uncertainty and ineptitude.’²⁴²

When Mansie is bitten, the Laird is busy ‘filling a bowl of gooseberries,’²⁴³ which symbolise the fruits of the island. In an attempt to comfort Mansie after he is bitten,

²³⁸ Brown, ‘Tithonus’, p.64.

²³⁹ George Mackay Brown, ‘The Laird’s Son’ in *Winter Tales* (London: John Murray Publishers Ltd, 1995) p.30.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., p.38.

²⁴¹ George Mackay Brown, ‘A Winter Tale’ in *The Sun’s Net* (Edinburgh: Polygon 2010) p.5.

²⁴² Brown, ‘Toryism Means Destruction’, p.2.

²⁴³ Brown, ‘Tithonus’, p.63.

the Laird offers him some. He accepts, picks a gooseberry from the bowl and ‘looked at it wonderingly.’²⁴⁴ After his sample, Mansie continues to eat:

The cupped palm of his hand brimmed with gooseberries. He bit into several, one after the other, with a half-reluctant lingering relish. Then he crammed six or seven into his mouth till his cheek bulged. His brown eyes dissolved into rapture; he closed them; there was a runnel of juice from one corner of his mouth.²⁴⁵

The sweetness of the fruit is foreign to him. At first, he does not know exactly what to do with it; when he does, he misjudges how to consume it. The implication is that Mansie, and by an extension those of lower social class than the Laird, is unable to comprehend or control a position of power, and is unclear what to do with the fruits of their labour. After Mansie rejects the Laird’s offer of assistance, Brown writes that ‘the gooseberry bush twanged. The young anarchist was plucking another fruit.’ Brown’s use of the word ‘anarchist’ in relation to a character plucking from a bush is telling; Mansie is not a rebel because he is picking fruit. Rather, he is portrayed as an ‘anarchist’ because he dares to draw from the same pool as the Laird. As Mansie continues to verbally attack the laird, he tells him that

The gooseberries were good. They’re not your gooseberries though. They belong to the whole island by rights. I was only taking my share.²⁴⁶

While Mansie’s opinions are representative of a young ‘anarchist’ who wants to protest about the social order, the Laird represents the higher echelons of society who, purely accustomed to a life of comfort, want to preserve it:

I [the Laird] turned and went inside, carrying the bowl of gooseberries. (There would be one pot of jam less next winter.) I traversed, going to the kitchen, a corridor with an ancient ineradicable sweetness of rot in it.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., p.65.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., p.66.

Mansie's passionate verbal attack on the Laird and the Laird's indifferent reaction to it echoes what Brown opines in 'Why Toryism Must Fail', discussed in Chapter One. In that article, Brown writes that 'when people nowadays rail against the aristocracy, they are only wasting their breath.'²⁴⁸ When the Laird returns to his house, leaving Mansie outside, Mansie's breath has been wasted. Whether or not the Laird is the person of power is not entirely important in this instance; what Brown is portraying is the distinction between the establishment and the general population: the powerful occupy a space that the general population cannot penetrate. It is also worth considering that Brown's desire to rise up and do something about his perceived injustice is present in the character of Mansie in this episode – while Mansie's efforts may be 'wasted', there remains hope that must be articulated.

As evidenced from Mansie's speech, characters in Brown's fiction are aware of social order and of their place in it. As in more immediately recognizable works of political persuasion within Scottish fiction (for example Welsh, Kelman and Warner) Brown uses language to distinguish between classes. During Mansie's meeting with the Laird, he announces that 'Rob and Willie and me, [...] we're bastards. I bet I've shocked you. I bet you think I said a bad word.'²⁴⁹ Through deliberate use of the word 'bastard', Mansie consolidates the social barrier between the Laird and himself. Though this use of language is not consistent enough within Brown's fiction to create a distinct working class voice, it does tell us that Brown's awareness of it enables some of his characters to add to the working class chorus emanating within Scottish literature. Christine Muller's interpretation of Kelman's use of swearing within his work can equally be applied to Brown's employment of it in 'Tithonus':

Perception and reality both support the notion of a special working-class connotation of swearing. In such a context, it is likely that the use of frequent swearing in a novel helps to create a working-class voice and, if it is used within a supportive and positive framework, swearing can be a powerful tool for cultural identity and political commentary rather than as an indication of stigmatisation or ignorance.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ Brown, 'Why Toryism Must Fail', p.6.

²⁴⁹ Brown, 'Tithonus', p.66.

²⁵⁰ Christine Amanda Muller, *A Glasgow Voice: James Kelman's Literary Language* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011) p.233.

Analysis of religion in Brown's stories has tended to focus on what he, as a Catholic, believes; sometimes ignoring what he does not believe. Berthold Scheone states that 'often Brown seems tempted to introduce a religious dimension into his stories: the omnipresent and omnitemporal reality of God. It is his belief as a Catholic Christian that there is always one more dimension to everything that happens in this world.'²⁵¹ Brown's portrayal of the Church of Scotland in his work is not simply about his personal journey of faith, however. Often, he uses this to inform us about his societal beliefs.

This study has already established that Brown made links between 'the establishment' and the Church of Scotland, describing a stereotypical member of 'the establishment' as a 'silk-hatted, church-going, eminently respectable manufacturer and trader'²⁵² – Chapter One posed possibilities regarding Brown's links between the Church and what he viewed as the 'establishment'. This is echoed in his creative stories, with the island minister often personifying what Brown views as the establishment: powerful, seemingly respectable, secure and sometimes corrupt. 'WR' is a story that charts Andrew Flaws' journey from the harbour, having returned from whaling all summer, to his croft several miles away. The actions of the individuals Flaws encounters on his journey highlight the treatment of a working man that a capitalist system enables, making the story partially an allegory for the capitalist system as a whole.

While away working, Flaws' fiancée Peterina's father, old Jock Gold the roadman, was killed, leaving Flaws with a number of debts to settle on his return. A portion of the debt lies with the Church for the burial. On his journey, Flaws visits Mr Selly, the minister, to pay his debts. It is worth quoting this section at length in order to gain a sufficient picture of Brown's depiction of the minister:

'How much do the fees come to?' said Flaws.
'Five shillings,' said Mr Selly, 'a half-crown for the gravedigger and the same amount for me.'

²⁵¹ Berthold Schoene, "I Imagined Nine Centuries...': Narrative Fragmentation and Mythical Closure in the Shorter Historical Fiction of George Mackay Brown", *Scottish Literary Journal*, Aberdeen, 22.2 (Nov 1st, 1995) p.41.

²⁵² Brown, 'Why Toryism Must Fail', p.6.

Flaws brought a handful of silver and copper out of his pocket. He picked out a large crown piece and set it on the manse table.

‘There,’ he said.

‘Splendid,’ said Mr Selly. He unlocked a metal box on the sideboard and put the crown piece inside. ‘If they were all like you, Andrew.’

‘How much is a wedding fee?’ said Flaws.

‘Half a crown,’ said Mr Selly.

Flaws picked a half-crown out of the heaped treasure in his fist and laid it on the table. ‘I’ll be marrying Peterina Gold of Fadoon at the end of the harvest,’ he said.

‘Very good’, said Mr Selly. I’m glad to hear it. You will have to see the Session Clerk, of course, Mr Work, so that the banns can be read in church. Splendid.’ He rattled the half-crown into the cash box and locked it. ‘I think we can dispense with receipts. We trust each other, don’t we? Andrew, I think this calls for a little celebration.’

He opened the cupboard door and took out a bottle and two glasses.²⁵³

Evidently, Mr Selly is portrayed as untrustworthy and, perhaps even more significantly, money-driven. In Brown’s depiction of capitalist society, money is God. In this extract, we see that money is the over-riding concern for the minister, more so than the spiritual wellbeing of Flaws and Peterina. As the meeting progresses, Mr Selly offers Flaws some cognac:

‘I know you will tell nobody this, but there was a French ship in the bay one night last month in the dark of the moon. Twenty-one kegs of brandy were taken off her, unbeknown to the excise, plus a large quantity of tobacco. Twenty-one kegs. Through an agency that I shall not divulge, one of those kegs found their way to the manse’. He winked at Flaws, then carefully filled two glasses with the brandy.²⁵⁴

After ‘carefully’ filling a glass, the minister offers no more. Again, Brown portrays the minister, a person who Flaws should be able to unequivocally trust, as being untrustworthy or sly. Throughout Flaws’ journey, he encounters different people who are primarily concerned with self-interest. Mr Selly represents that, at times, the Church may be no different and that it is the Capitalist system that encourages this outlook. Bernard Sellin states that, for Fionn Mac Colla,²⁵⁵ ‘the blight affecting the

²⁵³ Brown, ‘WR’, p.124.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ While Orkney may be distinct from elements of the Highland culture that writers like Mac Colla and Crichton Smith so closely link with the Church, there is

Highlands has a name: the Presbyterian Church. It is this desolation that Mac Colla's books lament endlessly.²⁵⁶ In Brown's shorter fiction, the Church can be seen as complicit within the 'establishment' and the rigid, restrictive society that they often encourage, and this offers new angles of consideration for the role of the Church within Brown's work. Another pertinent example of this can be observed in 'The Troubling of the Waters' from *A Calendar of Love* (1967). In this story, the islanders of Quoylay enjoy their respective whiskies, with all from the tinkers to the laird illegally distilling their own. One day, however a character, Sweyn, who had 'the finest still in the island', thought he had

Seen the excisemen walking up the hill. It turned out to be the new minister, not the exciseman at all. Sweyn went into the house, drank tea with the new minister and spoke civilly about politics and the weather. He never made whisky after that day.²⁵⁷

The story then concludes, rather abruptly, with Brown writing that

Nowadays there is a licensed grocer at the cross-roads, a Mr MacFarlane from Dalkeith, where the island people buy their whisky in sealed bottles at two pounds one shilling and sixpence a bottle.²⁵⁸

It is telling that it is not the exciseman but the 'new minister' who signals an end to the islanders' illicit whisky production. Note, too, that the grocer is owned by a man, whose first name we are not told, who comes from elsewhere: signaling a system that is of no benefit to the islanders. Recently, Linden Bicket has shown that 'Brown's religious writing goes far beyond the biblical':²⁵⁹ within this wide appreciation of Brown's religious writing, and consequently characters of religious devotion, it is

a shared political system throughout the United Kingdom as a whole that allows the Church to impact the lives of parishioners in a particular way.

²⁵⁶ Bernard Sellin, 'Post-war Scottish Fiction – Mac Colla, Linklater, Jenkins, Spark and Kennaway' in *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth Century Scottish Literature* ed by Ian Brown and Alan Riach (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009) p.127.

²⁵⁷ George Mackay Brown, 'The Troubling of the Waters' in *A Calendar of Love* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1970) p.85.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p.86.

²⁵⁹ Bicket, *Catholic Imagination*, p.176.

worth considering the role that ministers play within the societal structure of Brown's settings, and what this may tell us about both his politics and religious faith.

Divisions in Society

In promoting his political views in his journalism, Brown is often keen to distinguish between 'types' of people. For example, he frequently refers to workers, landowners, church-goers and farmers, often with pre-conceived ideas concerning their political ideas. Timothy Baker states that Brown's

writing at once draws upon a real, placed and organic Orcadian community and evokes interpretive communities of readers and other writers. Yet this focus on placed community often leads critics to argue that Brown is detached from larger political and cultural change.²⁶⁰

However, the transferable nature of the characters that Brown uses to highlight societal issues, this study contends, is one of the main features that enables his work to be applicable to wider issues: Brown's poor who struggle, or his lairds who profit, are not attached to a solely Orcadian context, but world over. Additionally, the timeless settings of Brown's stories mean that his characters, and consequently the positions that they find themselves in, are not tied to a specific political situation during a precise time.

'WR' (1967) is a story that documents the hazards of a capitalist, conservative system by highlighting divisions in society. When Flaws arrives back from whaling, he plans to 'rent the croft of Breck and marry Peterina'²⁶¹ with his earnings. First, however, he is tempted into 'The Arctic Whaler' where he 'bought rum for everyone.'²⁶² Flaws is then tempted into another pub, 'The White Horse', a new pub, where he is told by the barmaid that

'We welcome only the better sort of person here,' said the girl, 'the quiet country men, not the ruffians and tramps from the herring

²⁶⁰ Baker, *Philosophy of Community*, p.148.

²⁶¹ Brown, 'WR', p.115.

²⁶² Ibid.

boats and the whalers. And of course the office workers too, and business people. We're always very happy in the evening after the shops and offices close. No fighting scum from the boats ever cross the threshold of 'The White Horse.' Out of her pretty mouth she spat on the floor.²⁶³

The divisions of society are such that there are doors that will never really open for Flaws. Despite having more money than at any other point in his life, and having worked hard for it, Flaws is defined by his status, just as the establishment is defined by its. Brown displays a similar idea in 'Silver', when the narrator wishes to marry Anna, who is considerably above his social station. In his attempt to woo Anna, he approaches her door, where her sister informs him that Anna had moved to Edinburgh, where 'she is engaged to be married to Mr. Andrew Blair, a veterinary student. It will be announced in The Scotsman.'²⁶⁴ Like Flaws' position in 'The White Horse', the narrator in 'Silver' is defined by his social status, creating limitations that he must learn to abide by. After the barmaid's rant in 'WR', Flaws claims to be a commercial traveller, before his lie is uncovered and he is thrown out. After leaving, Flaws

Stood, hot with shame and resentment, on the road outside.
'A commercial traveller!' cried Small the lawyer's clerk at the bar.
Suddenly, the interior of The White Horse was loud with merriment,
the deep bass laughter of the farmers mingling with the falsetto
mirth of the lawyer's clerk and the merry tinkle of the barmaid.
Flaws walked on towards Birsay, red in the face.²⁶⁵

With Flaws' inability to penetrate the lines of class distinction, The White Horse becomes a symbol of the establishment. In addition to giving a clean, elegant contrast to the 'red' and 'hot' feelings of Flaws, the name refers to the horse that is said to be ridden by Patrick Sellar during the Highland Clearances. In his novel *Consider the Lilies* (1968), Iain Crichton Smith has Patrick Sellar ride a white horse, striking fear into the locals. When Mrs Scott, the novel's central protagonist, is visited by Sellar, her gossiping neighbour exclaims the next day that 'I hear the man on the white horse came to see you.'²⁶⁶ *Consider the Lilies* was first published one year before the initial

²⁶³ Ibid., p.116.

²⁶⁴ Brown, 'Silver', p.34.

²⁶⁵ Brown, 'WR', p.118.

²⁶⁶ Iain Crichton Smith, *Consider the Lilies* (Edinburgh, W and N Publishing, 2001) p.32.

publication of *TK*; it is possible, given Brown's admiration of Smith's work, that Brown was aware of this use, thus reiterating the connection Brown is making with other Scottish writers in terms of political writing that portrays the establishment in a particular manner. Timothy Baker has noted certain commonalities between Brown and Smith, stating that Smith's work 'similarly engages with the construction and ideology of the community.'²⁶⁷

Brown's description of The White Horse as being 'loud with merriment' consolidates the idea of contentment and comfort amongst the upper classes. When the 'deep bass laughter' reverberates around the bar, there is a sense of smugness at Flaws' situation. In this passage, Brown portrays the establishment as acutely aware of social distinctions while being equally determined to upkeep them. Flaws, the worker, is forced to walk the long road home.

As Flaws' journey continues, he benefits from the hospitality of Bella Jean Bews. Also aware of the distinctions in society, Bews tells Flaws that, when Peterina's father died, 'she didn't even have a drink of whisky to give to the peatcutters. It's a poor house thou're marrying into.'²⁶⁸ In this exclamation, Brown uses Bews to inform the reader that the capitalist cycle reaches all corners of society – it is not only the upper-class merchants of The White Horse who define people by their social status, but modest islanders like Bella Jean Bews too. After eating, Flaws settles debts with Bews for food and services during John Gold's death (she washed and clothed his body):

Flaws took a sovereign out of his belt and laid it on the table.
 'There', he said. 'I want no change.'
 'For your wedding,' said Bella Jean Bews, 'you'll be wanting a
 serving woman. And soon after that, no doubt, you'll be needing a
 midwife for Peterina. I'll be glad to come.
 'Yes,' said Flaws. 'Give me a last mug of strong ale, then I'll go.'²⁶⁹

In a similar manner to Flaws' encounter with Mr Selly, he meets another character whose foremost consideration is profit. Rather than thanking Flaws, Bews immediately turns her attention to ways to further her profit. In 'Why Toryism Must

²⁶⁷Baker, *Philosophy of Community*, p.16.

²⁶⁸ Brown, 'WR', p.119.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., p.120.

Fail', Brown writes that 'Capitalism rules our lives – 'we eat, sleep and work to the Capitalist rhythm.'²⁷⁰ So far, Flaws' life has been dictated by this capitalist cycle; his journey represents that – every character that he has met has been pre-occupied by profit that, in changing hands, consolidates the class lines that are already established.

Consideration of capitalism within Brown's community offers fresh angles of approach in Brown's fiction. In addition to this, readers' understanding of other works of twentieth century Scottish literature can be enhanced. George Douglas Brown's *The House with the Green Shutters* (1901), a book that Mackay Brown asserted to be 'the best Scottish novel of the twentieth century'²⁷¹ is worth contemplation. Timothy Baker believes that in this text

The community is ultimately that which denies an external perspective, because it is the grounding of human interaction itself. As much as one can rail against its power, it is impossible to conceive of a world that does not put community in a central position.²⁷²

So in Brown's 'WR' it might then be possible to inter-change 'community' for 'capitalism'. In Brown's short stories, such as 'TK', 'Tithonus', 'The Golden Bird' and others, capitalism provides the frame around which the community is built; it is not just the community that 'ultimately denies external perspective,' for the nature of the community is defined by the political system within which it must operate. Scott Lyall would seem to agree, writing of *The House with the Green Shutters* that

In Barbie capitalist individualism promotes competitive spite. Yet the baker (the maker of bread, that staple and sustainer of life), whilst a minor character, a Burnsian like his author, trades the false sentiment of the Kailyard for sympathy and in doing so offers a humane model of what community should be, one that provides an antidote to the malevolence poisoning Barbie: 'folk should be kind to folk.'²⁷³

²⁷⁰ Brown, 'Why Toryism Must Fail', p.6.

²⁷¹ Brown, *FI*, p.21.

²⁷² Baker, *Philosophy of Community*, p.12.

²⁷³ Scott Lyall, 'Tenshillingland: Community and Commerce, Myth and Madness' in *Community in Scottish Literature*, ed. by Scott Lyall (Brill-Rodopi: Leiden, 2016) p.10.

In Douglas Brown's *The House with the Green Shutters*, as well as in 'WR' and many of Mackay Brown's other short stories, the reader sees how 'capitalist individualism promotes spite.' If it is the Baker who provides an antidote for this in Barbie, it is Flaws himself who acts as an antidote to capitalist individualism in 'WR'. Flaws' main flaw is that he is unable to see when he is being 'played' by the system that he lives in. Flaws' requirement to part with his well-earned money on his journey home is rarely motivated by self-interest: he pays for his partners' debts, buys drinks for others and 'struggled like a fly in honey'²⁷⁴ when trying to resist the social pressure of visiting more pubs. Brown portrays Flaws, an agreeable, realistic, fundamentally good character who has weaknesses as a typical "victim" of the capitalist experience. Businesses prey on his temptations for alcohol and he is prone to giving in to temptation.

In many of Brown's short stories, the conclusion acts almost as an "anti-ending", where characters renew the cycle that life has placed upon them. For example, the closing lines of 'A Whaler's Return' tell the reader that Flaws aims to 'catch a few haddocks, before sunset. The laird will be wanting harvesters tomorrow or the day after.'²⁷⁵ Similarly, 'TK' ends with the main character, Bill, stating that he 'went out to the shed where I kept my fishing gear.'²⁷⁶ Until now, analysis of this common structure has been aligned with Brown's Catholicism. Ian Campbell, for example, concludes that as

a devout Roman Catholic, he [Brown] saw in the succession of the seasons of the Church and the natural world an order that is reflected in his fiction, 'TK', unchanging, reassuring, yet [...] one which brings death as well as life, winter as well as spring. A great deal of his output in fiction and in verse is about that cycle of creation and destruction, seen as not threatening, but completely naturally. For him, the surface must be transcended, the inner reality and rhythms of stasis and change shared.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴ Brown, 'WR', p.122.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., p.130.

²⁷⁶ Brown, 'TK', p.62.

²⁷⁷ Ian Campbell, 'Disorientation of Place, Time and Scottishness', *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature Volume Three, Modern Transformations: New Identities (from 1918)* ed. by Ian Brown (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007) p.109.

There is an element of validity to this. The cycle of life is intrinsically linked to death, allowing Brown to concisely incorporate ritual as an essential component of the island community. Brown's characters are often aware of this; while Flaws makes his way home, he envisages that 'next year he himself, the new crofter of Breck, would take part in this ritual of the corn, the cycle of birth, love, death, resurrection. He hurried on.'²⁷⁸ In a similar manner, Bill, 'TK's' protagonist, describes

A green offering hand, our valley, corn-giver, fire-giver, water-giver, keeper of men and beasts. The other hand that fed us was the blue hand of the sea, which was treacherous, which had claws to it, which took more than it ever gave. Today it was peaceable enough. Blue hand and green hand lay together, like praying, in the summer dawn.²⁷⁹

This quote is typical of Brown's use of religious imagery, leading his reader to the spiritual element of re-generation. It is worth considering, however, the varying reasons that the natural rhythms of the island must be taken advantage of. Firstly, there is the obvious necessity of nutrition: in almost all of Brown's stories, the cycle of fishing and farming is the main source of food for the islanders. In addition to this, there is the ever-present need for the farmers to satisfy 'the establishment', be it in desperately gathering the means to raise the rent money or to generally play their accustomed role in society. For example, in 'The Wireless Set', Hugh, who has just been informed of the death of his son, turns to the missionary and states

'it's time the last peats were down from the hill. I'll go in the morning first thing. You'll be needing a cart-load for the Manse.'²⁸⁰

The missionary is 'awed by such callousness.'²⁸¹ Here, Hugh is not failing to mourn because of faith in the natural rhythms of life; rather, he has a deeply engrained sense of his own position in society. His life is a treadmill of supplying, not only for himself and his family, but for the laird and the minister and not even the death of his son can divert him from this preoccupation. The missionary is only 'awed by such callousness' because, like the Laird in 'Tithonus', he is detached from general island

²⁷⁸ Brown, 'WR', p.121.

²⁷⁹ Brown, 'TK', p.50.

²⁸⁰ George Mackay Brown, 'The Wireless Set' in *TK and Other Stories* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1972) p.106.

²⁸¹ Brown, 'TK', p.106.

life to the extent that he cannot understand such pressures. As well as a spiritual aspect relating to the renewal of life, capitalist pressures dictate the islanders' lives, and fairer living conditions would present a partial solution to several of Brown's characters from the *TK* collection, particularly Bill and Flaws. This is not in keeping with Schoene's interpretation of Brown's solution:

In *TK*, particularly in the first two stories and the last one, Brown has chosen to focus on outsiders who struggle with problems inherent in most modern twentieth-century societies, brought by an acute sense of hopelessness and despair. [...] At the same time, he surprises, if not startles, his readership with what initially looks like his one and only solution to all of our problems: Catholicism.²⁸²

While it is difficult to disentangle the societal from the spiritual, the suggestion that Catholicism may even primarily look like Brown's 'one and only solution' is surely simplistic, and the range of challenges that characters face underlines this. During these challenges, we clearly see the characters' resilience - it is this that enables Brown to voice his belief in the working class, not just his belief in Catholicism. As he states in his early journalism: 'a new figure has lately appeared on the political scene, and will not leave until he is in sole possession. He is the worker.'²⁸³ Thus, it is worth contemplating the role that 'hope' plays in powering Brown's cycle of faith: while being propelled by his Catholicism, his belief that man can triumph over 'systems' of establishment is also key in the element of renewal that often underpins his work.

Conflict from Class Division

It has already been established that many of Brown's characters are forced into pre-defined roles in the community because of their social class. However, it is also worth considering what happens in Brown's fiction to characters who are not willing to occupy the position that a capitalist society has carved out for them. If there were to be no repercussions for characters who fail to abide by their social expectations, then Brown's championing of their cause would be nullified. However, this is not the case.

²⁸² Schoene, *The Making of Orcadia*, p.151.

²⁸³ Brown, 'Why Toryism Must Fail', p.6.

In the title story of Brown's collection *TK* he explores the circumstances of the marriage of Bill, a local fisherman, to Ingi, the daughter of a merchant. When Bill marries Ingi he is faced with clear expectations that are not particular to him: provide for Ingi, successfully work the land and attend church. Bill is aware of his modest position in society, stating early in the story that 'I called the boat Susanna after the laird's wife, a red-faced woman. I thought a name like that would bring me luck.'²⁸⁴

With a new boat and a new home, things are promising for Bill and Ingi. Bill soon finds, however, that he is no longer accepted in the valley:

That winter the other crofter-fishermen avoided me. Neither the old ones nor the young unmarried ones came near me. They had liked me well enough the summer before but now, since the marriage, I was, it seemed, unpopular. The men of Two-Waters especially kept to their own side of the bay.
I fished alone.²⁸⁵

The reader discovers later in the story that Ingi's father is a merchant who reaches into different corners of 'the establishment' - 'forby kirk elder, Justice of the Peace, chairman of the district council.'²⁸⁶ By marrying Ingi, Bill has moved above his social position and this is the catalyst for Bill's social isolation. It is important that Brown makes Bill and Ingi, the two characters who are only guilty of not abiding by social constructs, the characters who suffer.

It may be argued that, by having Bill marry Ingi, Brown is presenting an open society where, though there are lines of social classification, these lines are blurred and flexible. Their marriage may be interpreted as a victory for progressive society. However, the nature of their marriage proves otherwise. In a key argument, Bill tells Ingi that

You spend too much money every Wednesday at that grocery van. Don't buy any more jars of jam, and sponge cakes from the bake-house in Hamnavoe. We're poor people. Remember that.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁴ Brown, 'TK', p.39.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., p.46.

²⁸⁷ Brown, 'TK', p.43.

Here, we see that Bill and Ingi's respective social class is not something that can be transferred through marriage. Their outlooks on life, developed by their upbringing, are deeply rooted within each character. When these two characters from varying social classes are married, conflict is created.

This narrowness of vision has also been noted by Ian Campbell who states that Brown:

Achieved splendidly the art of thinking his way into a characters' geographically and socially limited vision, and compelling the reader to accept an approximation of that limited vision – as a preliminary to attacking the idea of 'limitation', and re-educating the reader to a better understanding of both vision and character.²⁸⁸

Bill and Ingi's shared and personal limitations are pertinent examples of this. When Ingi's father arrives and conflict is created, Brown deliberately makes differences in social class apparent, writing that Mr Sinclair arrives in the 'first car ever seen in the island.'²⁸⁹ While Ingi hurriedly goes to greet her father, Bill's reaction is different – 'as for me, I went on with my lines. I was not beholden to him.'²⁹⁰ These reactions are symbolic of Bill's general disregard for societal structures: Bill sees Mr. Sinclair as a human of no higher standing than him, and he wants to keep it that way. Bill's deep sense of pride in being self-sufficient means more to him than financial security:

'You and Ingi had a hundred pounds from me the week before you married,' said Mr. Sinclair quietly. 'One hundred pounds sterling, a cheque for that amount.
'You'll get it back,' I [Bill] said, 'every penny.'
[...] 'It was a present,' said Mr Sinclair.'²⁹¹

Rather than viewing this as a gift, Bill suspiciously holds this as an attempt from Mr. Sinclair to buy his control over the couple. Indeed, Bill's struggles, that originate from the Laird and Mr. Sinclair, set him as the victim of a capitalist system. Brown decried this system in his early journalism:

²⁸⁸ Ian Campbell, 'The Short Stories' from *George Mackay Brown: A Survey of his Work and a Full Bibliography* ed. By Hilda D. Spear (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press Ltd 2000) p.43.

²⁸⁹ Brown, 'TK', p.46.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., p.43.

²⁹¹ Ibid., p.47.

The Conservative Party is the party of the monied man. When we say monied man we don't mean a few lousy thousands in the bank. We mean the capitalist – he who juggles and gambles with the food, the employment, and the security of the common man (which means you and me and the entire population of Orkney).²⁹²

In *TK*, Bill is the common man who is suspicious of the establishment. This distrust of the establishment is pertinent throughout much of Scottish literature's concerns with class conflict. In *Trainspotting*, Spud deliberately self-sabotages his own job interview, sarcastically stating to his interviewer 'hey...whatever you say man. You're the man, the governor, the dude in the chair, so tae speak, likesay.'²⁹³ As with Bill's contention with Mr. Sinclair, Spud's issue with the interviewer is not a personal one. Though a more extreme example, Spud views having a job within the Capitalist model as a threat to his personal freedom. Bill also subscribes to this belief.

Hope for the Future

Brown closes his 'Why Toryism Must Fail' article that is discussed in Chapter Two by writing that

The farmers of Orkney will never have justice done them [sic] by relying on an antiquated and wasteful system like Toryism. They must, like their fellow workers, look towards the future with hope and confidence. For it is there only that the Dawn of Liberation will break; and already the East grows pale.²⁹⁴

With this, as outlined in Chapter Two, we see that Brown's early political writing ultimately carries a message of hope. Brown urges his readership to unify in opposition against those who he perceives to be the stakeholders in oppression. Again, a similar idea emanates from Brown's fiction. This is never more pertinent than Bill's alternative "christening" of his son in *TK*. Bill takes his son to the shore where, with his son sleeping in his arms, he exclaims

²⁹² George Mackay Brown, "Think Before You Vote", *OH*, 12th June 1945, p.6.

²⁹³ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (London: Vintage Books, 2004) p.66.

²⁹⁴ Brown, 'Why Toryism Must Fail', p.6.

‘Be honest. [...] Be against all darkness. Fight on the side of life. Be against ministers, lairds, shopkeepers. Be brave always.’²⁹⁵

It is also important to note that, when Bill returns to the croft, ‘Anna was lighting the lamp.’²⁹⁶ She then states

‘God help any poor body, [...] that has no home on a cold night like this. God help tinkers and all poor wandering folk.’
Yes,’ I [Bill] said, ‘and don’t forget the drunkard in the ditch.’²⁹⁷

Brown follows by writing that ‘the fire wasn’t out after all. There was a deep glow in the heart of the peats.’²⁹⁸ This links to the positivity with which Brown ends ‘Why Toryism Must Fail’. Brown believes that if people, in this case Bill²⁹⁹ and Anna, work together for the common good, then progress can be achieved. The driver of this is clear: Brown’s use of ‘glow in the heart’ suggests not just the literal description of the peats but of the root of human empathy, a warm, open heart. As was clear from the introduction to this thesis, Brown’s father had a keen interest in supporting the poor and oppressed. Brown upkeeps this tradition in *TK*, the climatic pagan ‘christening’ Brown’s way of both accentuating and humanizing his message.

For many critics, Brown’s thematic concern with the passing of time has been, like many of Brown’s themes, linked to his religion. This is valid and understandable; readers can see Brown’s religious convictions as underpinning his faith in the natural world as a provider. However, Tom Scott takes exception to this in an essay titled ‘Orkney as Pairt of an Eternal Mood’:

I have one reservation about this vision of life as an eternal cycle,
the birth, death and resurrection of the vegetation, of the year. If we

²⁹⁵ Brown, ‘TK’, p.60.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., p.61.

²⁹⁷ Brown, ‘TK’, p.62.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Religious imagery and political concern are not distinct dimensions within Brown’s writing, and this is rarely more evident than in the characterization of Bill, who claims that his ‘two saints are Tom Paine and Robert Burns’. Future study of both politics and spirituality within Brown’s work would be well advised to consider the blending of both elements.
Brown, ‘TK’, p.64.

think of it, the word 'cycle' is the wrong word and so is 'resurrection'. These imply that it is the same year that returns, the same grain (or body, in the Christian gloss) that rises. But it is not. Time is part of the eternal pattern, the year is a new one, the pattern is not a cycle but a spiral, each year coiled upon the last: new seed grows, not the old which really did die. [...] A new flower will bloom next year, but not the same one.³⁰⁰

Our understanding of Brown's politics underlines the broader point that Scott makes here: that we cannot view invention (and, as an extension, re-invention) within Brown's work as purely emanating from a religious perspective. This chapter has highlighted that Brown's political awareness props up many of the structures that comprise Brown's shorter fiction: the make-up of the community, the subsequent conflict within it and the drive to change it. These are all inspired by Brown's personal politics that are outlined, as evidenced in chapter one, in his early journalism. Indeed it is the characters seeking change and progress who might best be aligned with Brown himself. Flaws, Mansie and Bill are all characters that are upset at the social order of the community in which they live. Like Brown did in 1945 and beyond, they make efforts to change it.

³⁰⁰ Tom Scott, 'Orkney as Pairt of an Eternal Mood' in *Chapman 60 Special Feature on George Mackay Brown* (Edinburgh: Mayfair Printers 1990) p.35.

Conclusion - ‘Save that Day for Him’³⁰¹: Old Ways of Living in New Times – Further Explorations of Brown’s Politics

In the conclusion to the first academic study on Brown of note, Alan Bold refers to Brown’s work as a ‘timeless voyage’:

Brown’s work is beautifully shaped for survival. It is like a vast ocean over which shine star-like images and symbols. He takes us on a timeless voyage on the ocean and makes us aware of the profound depths beneath the glittering surface.³⁰²

One could interpret this ‘timeless voyage’ as one without destination. In essence, Bold concludes his study with a reiteration of his belief that Brown cannot (and, as an extension, should not) be confined within a literary ‘camp’. While the present study does generally agree with Bold’s conclusion, it hopes to offer new angles of consideration. Though Brown’s ‘timeless voyage’ does not have an ultimate destination, there are several significant areas of interest within that journey: Catholicism, community, progress, history and parochialism, amongst many others. These areas of interest have been charted to varying degrees.

In one of Brown’s weekly newspaper columns, he reflected on his time as what he termed the ‘Stromness Correspondent’, a period investigated in Chapter Two of this study. As Brown closed the article, he acknowledged the controversy that his articles caused and what this led him to believe:

Many severe rebukes were administered to me, by direct confrontation on the street or ‘Letters to the Editor’. It began to dawn on me that imaginative writing, and not journalism, might be my true calling.³⁰³

The irony of Brown writing this in what was his fifth decade of regular writing for Orkney Newspapers appears to be lost on him. This is interesting on a number of levels. Brown knew, as did his audience, that his reputation was created and cemented

³⁰¹ Brown, ‘Hamnavoe’, p.25.

³⁰² Bold, *George Mackay Brown*, p.113.

³⁰³ Brown, *Rockpools and Daffodills*, p.170.

as an imaginative writer of poetry and fiction. At the time of writing this article in 1987, Brown had already gained a considerable reputation. Imaginative writing provided much for him financially as well as aesthetically; it was both Brown's creative outlet and his practical provider.

It is undeniable that the nature, tone and content of Brown's writing in Orkney newspapers changed dramatically over the period in which he contributed. This is understandable – at the start of his career, Brown was employed at the *OH* as a journalist and, as his reputation as an imaginative writer gathered speed, Brown wrote what are essentially weekly columns for Orkney newspapers which, by their nature, allowed him to muse on a wide range of topics, mundane, local or pivotal and global as the time and mood suggested.

All of these writings, however, in their respective ways, are journalism. When reflecting on Brown's later articles (or columns) in Orkney newspapers, Iain Crichton Smith commented that

They are always well-written; they are, for the most part, about Orkney; they reveal a real person in a real place. Brown does not disguise himself in any way; here he is, with all his weaknesses and all his strengths. He is quite definite about what he likes and what he dislikes.³⁰⁴

This statement is likewise applicable to his earlier journalism as discussed in Chapter Two. In those articles we see Brown, without a reputation to protect, rage against what he perceived to be the injustices of modern Britain: evidencing his role in the Orkney community as both a young reporter and a political activist. In these formative years, he attends meetings and debates and then explicitly promotes his particular beliefs to the Orcadian public, often without pseudonym. By focusing on these early years, this study has unveiled Brown's level of political engagement, particularly throughout the run-up and aftermath of the 1945 General Election, to an extent not previously acknowledged.

³⁰⁴ Iain Crichton Smith, from *George Mackay Brown: A Survey of his Work and a Full Bibliography* ed. By Hilda D. Spear (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press Ltd 2000) p.17.

In order to make a thorough evaluation of Brown's politics, one must first acknowledge the importance of Brown's journalism to his body of work. Several Scottish writers have had this element of their work acknowledged by critics, while Brown has not. For example, Andrew Nash suggests, in the case of S.R. Crockett, that

it was not unusual for writers of this period to combine literature with journalism and it was typical for Scottish writers to write for both the Scottish and the wider British markets. In this respect Crockett can be compared to Barrie, Andrew Lang, William Sharp and George Douglas Brown, among others, all of whom straddled the local and national markets in their journalism.³⁰⁵

Robert Crawford acknowledges that such professional work 'could be a useful training ground for writers.'³⁰⁶ This was the case for several of Brown's near-contemporaries: Hugh MacDiarmid, Lewis Grassie Gibbon and Neil Gunn regularly produced writing on an array of issues for both local and national press. For all three of these writers, their journalism has been a key source of knowledge regarding their political views. Subsequently, this has complemented our understanding of their literature. However, Brown's own journalism remains underappreciated in terms of his body of work and, in turn, places unnecessary constraints on our understanding of his literature.

As discussed in the Introduction, by ignoring Brown's early and more overtly political journalism, critics are failing to fully explore Brown's artistic motives too. For example, in *The History of Orkney Literature*, Simon Hall states that Brown's 'concerns are political only in the very broadest sense of the word: spirituality is the core of his work.'³⁰⁷ It is important to note at this point that this study does not argue that politics are at the 'core' of Brown's concerns: rather, critics and readers can acknowledge and investigate the importance of Brown's key spiritual and historical themes without disregarding the importance and validity of other concerns. One may see the validity in Hall's interpretation, but only if the word 'political' is applied in its

³⁰⁵ Andrew Nash, *Kailyard and Scottish Literature* (Amsterdam: Brodopi Publishers 2007)p.91.

³⁰⁶ Robert Crawford, *Scotland's Books: The Penguin History of Scottish Literature* (London: Penguin Publishers 2007) p.483.

³⁰⁷ Hall, *The History of Orkney Literature*, p158.

narrowest possible sense. While Brown's fiction does contain relatively few direct political references (such as party politics or government policies), these are not necessary components for a text to be considered 'political'. Rather, it is Brown's depiction of community, and the structures that dictate social relations within these communities that reveals consistent political persuasions. This is far from being confined to Brown: several Scottish writers, from Burns to Welsh, have made politics central to their writing by 'focusing on social margins' that 'not only affirms their inhabitants but also illuminates the centre against which they are defined.'³⁰⁸ While there has been general acceptance of Brown's interest and depiction of those who are on 'social margins', this study has illuminated where this interest stems from, and how this fictional depiction can be directly linked to Brown's political writing from the infancy of his career.

Whereas Brown's earliest journalism, summarised through the case studies of Chapter Two, clearly cover 'politics' in a more explicit and direct sense, his shorter fiction, as studied in Chapter Four, transcends this political message through the politics of community. In *Scotland's Books: The History of Scottish Literature*, Robert Crawford states that

Scottish disenfranchisement extended far beyond party politics. It became a state of mind, an accent of imagination that might be a trap as well as a source of energy. Certainly it was reflected in campaigning for a devolved Scottish Assembly or Parliament, but there was also a sense of growing alienation from political processes, where in the decades following World War Two there had been a surge in material prosperity and upward social mobility encouraged by factors like the rapid expansion of the university education system.³⁰⁹

Here, Crawford highlights elements found within Brown's personal life and, consequently, his political persuasions. For example, Crawford's 'surge in material prosperity' has clearly been acknowledged and investigated by Brown in his fiction

³⁰⁸ Alan Freeman, 'Ghosts in Sunny Leith: Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*', in Susan Hageman (ed.), *Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), p. 251.

³⁰⁹ Robert Crawford, *Scotland's Books: The Penguin History of Scottish Literature* (London: Penguin Publishers 2007) p.658.

and has been identified by critics of his work. However, this theme has consistently been approached and analysed within a spiritual context.

This is partly due to Brown's claim in *OT* that 'there is a new religion, Progress, in which we all devoutly believe, and it is concerned only with material things in the present and in a vague golden-handed future.'³¹⁰ Critics have tended to follow Brown's concerns regarding progress through the spiritual telescope that his language created. Ron Ferguson writes that Brown's 'complaint against what passes for progress stems from a spiritual understanding that sees an uncritical adulation for modern technology's bounty as dangerous to the soul.'³¹¹ The present study does not disagree with the argument that the spiritual is central to Brown's writing, but it does contend that it ought to be possible to situate Brown's political views within this critical landscape. We can safely assert that Brown's own life can be found in elements of his fiction and his attitudes to progress are an example of this. We see this in his short story 'The Tarn and the Rosary', a tale which Bicket has recently acknowledged takes considerable inspiration from Brown's personal life.³¹² In *George Mackay Brown and the Scottish Catholic Imagination* (2017), Bicket insightfully goes on to enhance our understanding of Brown's spiritual journey through our reading of 'The Tarn and the Rosary', amongst other examples of Brown's work. This thesis agrees that we may be able to glean understanding of both Brown and his work (fiction or otherwise) by approaching them holistically. Where Bicket states that 'Brown's conversion is explained first through art, and later through "real life" accounts,'³¹³ this thesis contends that we can also learn from Brown's politics, which are explained first through journalism, and then through art. Consider the crossover between this section from 'The Tarn and the Rosary' and the afore-discussed journalism:

progress, that's the modern curse. This island is enchanted with the idea of Progress [...] This worship of Progress, it will drain the life out of every island and lonely place. In three generations Norday will be empty. For, says Progress, life in a city must be superior to

³¹⁰ Brown, *OT*, p.20.

³¹¹ Ferguson, *The Wound and the Gift*, p.249.

³¹² Bicket, *Catholic Imagination*, p.59.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

life in an island [...] Will there be a few folk left in the world, when Progress is choked at last in its own too much? Yes, there will be. A few folk will return by stealth to the wind and the mist and the silences. I know it...³¹⁴

With this quote, we see a thread that runs through Brown's non-fiction (*OT*) and his fiction ('The Tarn and the Rosary')³¹⁵ that starts with his early journalism. It is essential that we consider Brown's interest in material progress in wider terms and evaluate what impact he believes Progress, and its social and political consequences, will have on the community. When Jock, the character who launches into this rant against progress, utters the previous quote, he is not only concerned with the advancement of physical objects; he, like Brown, is worried about how this will impact on the way that people interact with each other. While this concern is not explicitly aired in a party political sense within Brown's writing, it is political nevertheless, linking to the disenfranchisement that Crawford referred to as a 'state of mind'.

The timing of Brown's early journalism is also worth noting. Brown had a prolonged journey towards the Catholic faith before his eventual conversion in late 1961. As this conversion was before any of his fiction was published, and before any notable mainstream success, critics have, understandably, been keen to focus on the spiritual element that is prevalent within his work. Ron Ferguson states that, as Brown approached his fortieth birthday in mid-1961 'the shackles of his Presbyterian inheritance [were] decisively broken, [he was] resourced by a more expansive spirituality, and encouraged by the responses to his *OH* articles, he was ready for the next critical stage, both as a writer and as a pilgrim.'³¹⁶ Here, Ferguson has identified Brown's development as a writer alongside his spiritual awakening. By acknowledging and investigating Brown's political development during and preceding this period of his life, we gain a wider perspective than that referenced by Ferguson. We must consider not only the development that the *OH* articles had on his skill as a writer, but what those articles actually articulated and what they tell us about

³¹⁴ George Mackay Brown, 'The Tarn and the Rosary' in *Hawkfall and Other Stories* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2004) p.179.

³¹⁵ Joseph Pearce, *Literary Converts: Spiritual Inspiration in an Age of Unbelief* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006) p.444.

³¹⁶ Ferguson, *The Wound and the Gift*, p.56.

Brown as a person: the attacks on landowners, Tories, factors and lairds that he amplifies in the articles are all ideas that are also prominent in his creative writing.

The difficulties facing the general working population of Orkney (and beyond) are ideas that are not just present in Brown's short fiction. In Brown's novels, for example, there are numerous events that enable him to highlight political dangers for a fragile community, perhaps most notably in his consideration of the impact of the government programme Operation Black Star in *Greenvoe* (1972). Relatively recent political concerns are also prominent in *Magnus* (1973), where Brown applies Orcadian history to contemporary political concerns of Nazism. Additionally, Brown deals with themes such as nationalism in *Beside the Ocean of Time* (1994), while considering the political actions of the past and their impact on the present. Perhaps most pertinently, however, Brown regularly captures themes that derive from his political opinions in his poetry: inequality, struggle and faith in community. One such example is found in 'Farm Labourer', taken from Brown's 1965 poetry collection *The Year of the Whale*:

'God, am I not dead yet?' said Ward, his ear
 Meeting another dawn.
 A blackbird, lost in leaves, began to throb
 And on the pier
 The gulls stretched barbarous throats
 Over the creels, the haddock lines, the boats.
 His mortal pain
 All day hung tangled in that lyrical web.

 'Seventy years I've had of this', said Ward,
 'Going in winter dark
 To feed the horse, a lantern in my fist,
 Snow in my beard,
 Then thresh in the long barn
 Bread and ale out of the skinflint corn,
 And such-like work!
 And a lark flashed its needle down the west.³¹⁷

In this particular poem, Brown captures the hard labour of the farm worker. Vitally, however, this work is all-consuming – the demands of Ward's work are such that they

³¹⁷ Brown, 'Farm Labourer' from *The Collected Poems of George Mackay Brown*, p.46.

drain the life from him, underlined by the wry, cold question of ‘am I not dead yet?’ in the opening line. Despite this, the blackbird that is energized and the lark that ‘flashed’ towards ‘the west’³¹⁸ both convey a latent sense of hope.

This element of hope, alongside Brown’s subtle glorification of manual work reflects the wider concerns that this study urges regarding his attitudes to progress. His reservations were not just material – he worried that progress that was not regulated by principled, fair politics would add further challenges to the lives of working people. In this sense, there are other parallels between Brown and those who would be more readily accepted as writers of political concern. Jeffrey Karnick suggested that Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting* served to ‘provide a way of rethinking traditional notions of selfhood and its place in the world...[and suggest] new ways of living in the world.’³¹⁹ In a paradoxical way, Brown does the same thing: he suggests old ways of living in a new world.

Political concerns can also be found in Brown’s drama, an area of his work that is rarely the recipient of focus, despite Brown having five plays published in addition to several unpublished manuscripts.³²⁰ Brown’s best-known play, *A Spell for Green Corn* (1970), is underpinned by the societal conflict to which this study has regularly referred; Donald Campbell states that ‘using a host of characters to depict a society which has undergone significant social change – turning from the sea to the land for sustenance – the play draws a parallel between this economic change and the spiritual change created by the Reformation.’³²¹ More recently, and in a more overtly political link, Linden Bicket has discussed the political themes of the unpublished *Our Lady of*

³¹⁸ It is worth noting the possible wider significance of ‘the west’, in a political and societal sense, something we also see in Sorley Maclean’s ‘Hallaig’, which opens with Maclean describing how ‘The window is nailed and boarded through which I saw the West’.

Sorley Maclean, ‘Hallaig’ in *Twentieth Century Scottish Poetry* ed. by Douglas Dunn (London: Faber and Faber, 2006) p.131.

³¹⁹ Jeffrey Karnick, ‘Irvine Welsh’s Novel Subjectivities,’ *Social Text* 21: 3, Autumn 2003, pp. 138, 149.

³²⁰ Donald Campbell, ‘The Drama: Greenness in Every Line’ from *George Mackay Brown: A Survey of his Work and a Full Bibliography*, p.64.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, p.67

the Waves (1964). Set in the future,³²² the play captures the harsh realities that certain political structures can build, with Bicket stating that ‘the totalitarian regime and its severe restriction of religion in the Eastern Bloc-controlled former Czechoslovakia is built into the fabric’³²³ of the play. Like his other creative work, there is potential for our understanding of Brown’s dramas to be deepened should we acknowledge and consider how political themes emerge from (and are informed by) his early political journalism.

Thus, it is important to stress that, though this thesis focuses on a select number of Brown’s short stories, political readings can also be undertaken across Brown’s creative catalogue. Much of the power within Brown’s writing is propelled by political questions that are often posed by pertinently political characters.³²⁴ In addition to considering characterization and the construction of community, our understanding of how politics manifests itself within Brown’s creative writing should be illuminated rather than obscured by our growing understanding of his spirituality. Recent publications such as Bicket’s *George Mackay Brown and the Scottish Catholic Imagination*, and their discussion of Brown’s vision of society, add to this opportunity. This thesis does not apply a political reading to Brown’s stories as an exhaustive articulation of politics within his writing but as a starting point.

³²² In 2014, *The Scotsman* newspaper published, for the first time, a short story by Brown titled *The Golden Goose*, written in 1976. The story, set in 2001, explores life on Orkney if it gained independence. Though it is not a regularly employed feature of Brown’s writing, a futuristic setting has enabled him, on occasion, to explore political theories and their impact on society.

Brian Ferguson, ‘George Mackay Brown’s Independence Folly’ 29/03/14 <http://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/books/george-mackay-brown-s-orcadian-independence-folly-1-3357704> [last accessed 23rd September 2017].

³²³ Bicket, *Catholic Imagination*, p.95.

³²⁴ A key example of this would be ‘The Skarf’ in *Greenvoe*, a Marxist historian who provides the novel with a political (and as extension, moral) compass. There are considerable possibilities for further study of this character alone, whose political role within the story is not dis-similar to that of Chae Strachan in Lewis Grassie Gibbon’s *Sunset Song* (1932). There are also opportunities regarding consideration of Brown’s political voice manifesting itself within this character, blending Brown’s stance on the political issues in *Greenvoe* with the Skarf’s fictitious outlook.

Moreover, this study does not seek to argue that Brown's early journalism should be considered as his best writing, or indeed anything close to it. From the case studies discussed in Chapter Two, and reading of the articles in their entirety (see appendices), this work gives us an accurate impression of Brown in his first phase: an inexperienced writer who had not yet developed the skill of subtlety that underpinned his best-known work. However, this thesis has aimed to highlight how study of this largely neglected area of Brown's work can hugely enhance our understanding of some of his most important works.

In an essay titled "'Out of the World and into Blawearie": The Politics of Scottish Fiction' (1999), Douglas Gifford briefly yet explicitly summarises the political worth that he regards significant twentieth century Scottish writers to hold:

although MacDiarmid and others like Neil Gunn and Lewis Grassie Gibbon were extremely active in their own lives in a range of politics which spans Communism, Socialism and Nationalism, repudiating the dominating Tory ethos of the nineteenth century, almost invariably every major author from MacDiarmid to Eric Linklater and Edwin Muir in the end retreated from involvement in politics.³²⁵

With the greatest of respect to Gifford's views, this thesis has sought to strongly dispute these assertions. Firstly, this study, and Chapter Two in particular, has indisputably demonstrated that Brown was 'extremely active' in 'repudiating the dominating Tory ethos' through his early journalism. Gifford then goes on to list what Baker describes as a 'surprising'³²⁶ list of Scottish writers in whose work he claims 'there is a detachment from history and politics which is virtually complete [...]: Norman MacCaig, Iain Crichton Smith, George Mackay Brown and even James Kelman and Irvine Welsh.'³²⁷ In a more detailed discussion regarding Brown's perceived irrelevance in a political sense, Gifford states that the

³²⁵ Douglas Gifford, "'Out of the World and into Blawearie": The Politics of Scottish Fiction' in *The Polar Twins* ed. by Edward J. Cowan and Gifford (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1999) p.297.

³²⁶ Baker, *Philosophy of Community*, p.165.

³²⁷ Gifford, "'Out of the World and into Blawearie'", p.297.

work of George Mackay Brown, in poetry and fiction, can stand forever as a memorial to his beloved Orkney; but even the most sympathetic of readers would not claim that Mackay Brown's underlying mythology [...], set within a curiously pagan and Scandinavian islandscape, has much truck with a contemporary Scotland facing political challenge and immense social change – indeed, throughout Brown's work there is an explicit hostility to Progress, identified as a destroyer of the simplicity and harmony of small communities.³²⁸

This quote demonstrates a limited scope of interpretation and appreciation of Brown's work. Whereas this work does not deny, nor seek to question, Brown's 'hostility' to progress, it does invite the reader to question the nature and design of the progress that Brown's work scrutinizes. Brown is keen, as his early journalism illustrates, to interrogate progress as the builder of social instability and inequality. He questions the impact that aspects of progress will have on fragile communities, and portrays the tensions that societal structures within it create. Specifically, it is Brown's view of progress as a 'destroyer of the simplicity and harmony of small communities' that makes him a writer of political concern. In the summer of 2017, the primary school on North Ronaldsay, the northernmost inhabited Orkney Island, closed after its only pupil left: yet another blow for a community which has halved in number since 1977, when it consisted of one hundred and sixty residents.³²⁹ With the evidence presented in this thesis, how can one assert that Brown's work has little relevance to a 'contemporary Scotland facing political challenge and immense social change'?³³⁰

In her conclusion to *George Mackay Brown and the Scottish Catholic Imagination*, Linden Bicket asserts that 'broadening the scope of the Scottish literary-critical lens is an important step in the fresh and inclusive consideration of all writers.'³³¹ This study has sought to argue that the lens that Bicket refers to should be wide enough to capture and appreciate Brown's politics, not separately, but as part of the whole - for it is only when one recognises the aligning parts of Brown's cultural mission, from

³²⁸ Ibid., p.298.

³²⁹ Anon, 2011 Census: First Results on Population and Household Estimates for Scotland, *Statistical Records of Scotland*, (August 2013), (<http://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/documents/censusresults/release1c/rel1c2sb.pdf>) [last accessed 23rd September 2017].

³³⁰ Gifford, "Out of the World and into Blawearie", p.297.

³³¹ Bicket, *Catholic Imagination*, p.179.

faith to community to politics, that justice can be made in interrogating the work of a writer whose scope stretched far beyond the Orkney horizon. When discussing Robert Burns in a 1977 column for the *Orcadian*, Brown concluded that ‘the wise thing would be not to try to fit such men into any [...] stable: narrow cribs and boxes cannot contain them.’³³² We would do well to take heed of his advice.

³³² George Mackay Brown, ‘Which Party Would Burns Support?’ in *UBB*, p.70.

Appendix One

'Why Toryism Must Fail' is primarily discussed in Chapter Two, Case Study One.

6
THE ORKNEY HERALD, TUESDAY, MAR 1945

Why Toryism Must Fail

A thousand years ago we had the Feudal System in Britain. According to it, absolute temporal power was vested in the king: all his subjects, from the most powerful baron to the most humble serf, were completely under his sway: against the decisions of the sovereign lord there was no appeal. The history of the next seven hundred years in Britain is of a great struggle between the crown and the nobility for the control of government. The Cromwellian Civil War of the early 17th Century and the very mild "Revolution" at the end of it, finally established the supremacy of the nobility. Thereafter the power of royalty steadily declined, until to-day the king, the titular head of the British constitution, has really no voice in the government of the country at all.

But power did not remain perpetually with the nobility. A new class arose in Britain, thrown up by the tremendous social disturbance of the Industrial Revolution—the wealthy merchant class, otherwise known as the Upper Middle Class. Its gospel was Capitalism and Industrial Competition; others prefer to call it more frankly, Exploitation of the Workers. When Left-Wing people nowadays rail against the Aristocracy, they are only wasting their breath. For the power of the aristocrats declined during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries almost as drastically as the Royal power had previously done. The real and palpable enemy is the silk-hatted, church-going, eminently respectable manufacturer and trader. It is he who steers the ship of State. Fortunately his days of power are almost gone. For a new figure has lately appeared on the political scene, and will not leave it

until he is in sole possession. He is the Worker.

The history, then, of the thousand years since the Norman Conquest, is a logical process by which the absolute political power passes from one fallible man, by a gradual process, sometimes fast, sometimes slow, until, as in Russia, it finally comes to be broadly based on the Will of the People. In Britain the change has come about without undue strife or violence. Revolution occurs only when all progressive elements in a nation are violently repressed over a long period of time. Violence is the only answer to violence. To-day Capitalism is disproved and outmoded; but still

the Fourth, who was said to have left one or two illegitimates in these parts. On the other hand, the term "working-man" (and 99.9 per cent. of Orcadians must work to keep the bite in their mouth) implies that the bearer is a member of a great new caste which must, logically and inevitably, inherit political power for as far ahead as we can see. It is a label to cherish and to be proud of. When your grandchildren ask how it went with you in your young days, make sure now that you will never reply: "I was a worker, but I voted for Neven-Spence, the Tory." Because if you do, there is a danger that they will cap you in the State Asylum, where indeed you would logically belong.

It is often stated that the farmers of Orkney are Tory to a man. I happen to know that this is not true. A great many of the more shrewd and intelligent farmers are fiercely anti-Tory in their views. Some, indeed, are proud to be called Communists. But I think the sad fact remains that Toryism is too strong among the local agriculturists. Why this should be is extremely puzzling. The record of the "National" Government with regard to the farmers is very bad indeed. Since 1935 incompetent Ministers of Agriculture have succeeded each other with alarming regularity, but the farmers' position remains as unsatisfactory as ever. The farmers of Orkney will never have justice done them by relying on an antiquated and wasteful system like Toryism. They must, like their fellow-workers, look towards the future with hope and confidence. For it is there only that the Dawn of Liberation will break; and already the East grows pale.

February 1945.

BY

G. M. B.

Appendix Two

'Think Before You Vote' is primarily discussed in Chapter Two, Case Study Two.

THINK BEFORE YOU VOTE

Before slavishly following Mr Churchill's injunction to vote for the Conservative candidate on July 5th (our Conservative candidate is, of course, Major Basil H. H. Neven-Spence) consider carefully the following points:

1. Conservative foreign policy prior to 1939 was consistent hostility to Russia. There is no evidence in their ranks of a change of heart towards Russia.

2. War with Russia would, quite literally, mean the end of British civilization. Tory mis-handling of foreign policy can, quite conceivably, render a remote possibility a terrifying certainty. There are already disquieting signs of antagonism towards Russia in Conservative ranks. Be sure to ask Major Neven-Spence to define his attitude to Russia.

3. Major Neven-Spence voted in Parliament in July 1939 (in the piping days of peace, mind you) against increasing the Old Age Pension. (Tories' reason—they couldn't afford it). Six months later they were spending six millions a day on WAR; and they were spending it to little effect. In 1944 the daily bill was £16,000,000. Yet at the height of our prosperity Neven-Spence's party couldn't give our old people a few extra shillings per week. Major Neven-Spence should most definitely be challenged on this point when he visits your district.

4. The Conservative Party is the party of the monied man. When we say monied we don't mean a few lousy thousands in the bank. We mean the capitalist—he who juggles and gambles with the food, the employment, and the security of the common man (which means you and me and the entire population of Orkney). Put the capitalist in power and your whole existence is in the hands of an unscrupulous and relentless profit-making machine. Free enterprise means just this—freedom for the capitalist (supported by Major Neven-Spence) to exploit you and rob you on every hand—and freedom for you (the common man) to live on starvation wages, to read the "Daily Express" (what an ineffable privilege!) and afterwards to go to the devil.

5. Unemployment figures under Tory rule rose before the war to well over the 2,000,000 mark. Consider that remarkable fact quite dispassionately, and what does it mean? It means in the first place, that far more than the stated figure of two millions felt the blight of unemployment; wives, children, dependants were also affected. It is safe to say that 8,000,000 people felt the bitter curse of unemployment under Tory rule—8,000,000 people, or one in every five of our population.

In the second place, a fertile and immensely rich nation like ours, had failed under the Capitalist system to produce the goods. That such a system contains very serious flaws must be obvious to everyone, BUT THE FLAWS HAVE NEVER BEEN ELIMINATED. They still exist. A continuation of capitalism means ruin, utter and irremediable. Ask Major Neven-Spence what his party's proposes to do about it.

6. Until the Labour and Liberal Parties joined the Coalition in 1940, the Tories under Chamberlain were bungling the war badly. Bungling and Toryism are, in fact, inseparable. Of course, if you want a brave new world of stinking hovels, the dole, low wages, and the imminent threat of war, Major Neven-Spence is the man for you. But if you have any horse sense, do please, whatever Mr Churchill says, give him his walking ticket on July 5th. Do so, and posterity will not fail to acclaim your action.

G. M. B.

Appendix Three

'July 26th In Stromness' is primarily discussed in Chapter Two, Case Study Three.

JULY 26th IN STROMNESS

By G. M. B.

It is really difficult to give you a clear picture of the reactions of the Stromness people to the General Election results announced last Thursday. Neven-Spence's victory did little to encourage our Tories, who became more and more despondent as the day went on, and it became clear that the Government has suffered a heavy defeat. The little flame of joy which sprang up in their breasts when it was known that Neven-Spence had scraped in by the skin of his teeth, was soon snuffed when all over Britain the high Tory hopes of victory exploded with a loud and spectacular bang. I suppose, however, that of all people, the Liberals on that fateful day were most despondent. Joseph Grimond fought this campaign in Orkney and Shetland most brilliantly for them; and they can rest assured that no other candidate could have brought them close to victory. Grimond's honourable defeat was rendered more poignant to the Liberals by their heavy losses in other constituencies. Sir Archibald Sinclair, Lady Bonham-Carter and her son, and Sir William Beveridge have all suffered defeat; also two Liberals well-known in Orkney—Lady Glen-Coats in Paisley and Lieut. John Junor in Aberdeen and Kincardine; the latter, like Major Grimond, losing by only a very small majority. Many Liberal seats were lost by a mere handful of votes; and the fact that the party polled, in all, well over two million votes, shows that Liberalism is far from dead. However, there is little doubt that on the 26th the Stromness Liberals were extremely disappointed men.

The most jubilant of all the local factions were the Labour people. They were jubilant for two reasons. Even though Prophet Smith, their candidate, was bottom of the Poll, he by no means suffered a rout. Indeed, the three candidates were so close (with hardly a thousand votes separating Neven-Spence from Smith) that if the election had been conducted under normal circumstances, any one of the other two might have slipped home. We must remember that in Shetland over 2000 merchant seamen were disenfranchised. In other words 2000 vital votes were lost; and the majority of them would undoubtedly have gone to Prophet Smith. In these circumstances the Socialists of Orkney feel entitled to be highly optimistic over the result of the next Orkney and Shetland election. But what really filled the local Socialists with joy abounding was the remarkable and totally unexpected victory of the Labour Party all over the country. At noon the radio announcement of the state of the parties revealed that a heavy swing to the Left had set in. As the afternoon wore on and it became evident that Labour was in power with a huge majority to work on, I witnessed scenes of enthusiasm which no man is likely to see more than two or three times in his life. One local lady (obviously a Socialist) danced across the street in her enthusiasm. Another is said to have cut a huge square out of the back of her husband's Sunday shirt, dipped it in a bowl of scarlet dyes, and then nailed this improvised Red Flag to the clothes-pole in her garden. Everywhere I went I encountered Socialists wearing a smile of invincible triumph. Here and there a Tory taunted them with the Prophet's defeat. It made no difference—Prophet or no Prophet, Labour was in, and it would take something to get them out again. In the evening of that memorable day, as the shades lengthened, I regret to state that some of them went to celebrate their great victory in the canteens, and came home in the "gim-lings," "spiritually" as well as politically intoxicated. And meantime in the capital of the Empire, in the great Central Hall, London, an enthusiastic concourse celebrated the Socialist landslide. They sang, appropriately enough, William Blake's great anthem, "Jerusalem," which embodies so many of their ideals and desires in immortal verse:

I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand
Till we have built Jerusalem.

In England's green and pleasant land—
Yes, it was a great day for Labour, and millions of others look forward to a period of Labour rule, to a long and fruitful period of intellectual and social progress among all our people. We look forward to the day when, out of the squalor and squalid and poverty of the present, the promised new Jerusalem arises on England's green and pleasant land.

Appendix Four

The Uncollected Early Journalism of George Mackay Brown, 1939-51

Drawn from the private archive of Brian Murray, and cross-checked at the Orkney Library and Archive, the following list catalogues Brown's early journalism. Though this list may not be exhaustive, it is extensive, acknowledging many pieces of writing by Brown that have been ignored since their original publication between the years 1937 and 1951. This list covers Brown's earliest appearances in the *OH* until he left Orkney to study at Newbattle in the summer of 1951.

This list illustrates the breadth of Brown's writing during the period before he moved to Edinburgh. From the titles of these articles, one can infer the range of subjects that he is dealing with during this time. Brown covers what may seem to be minor local issues to major world issues – the starting point of the blending of the local and the global – or 'glocal' – quality that underpinned his writing throughout his career. This list also reveals the breadth and depth of Brown's reading – note the number of book reviews that Brown writes for his 'Bookshelf' feature.³³³

Included in this list are Brown's first 'Island Diaries'. First appearing in 1945, this was a weekly column in which Brown could cover a topic of his choice. After the *OH* ceased publication in 1961, this column was then published in *The Orcadian* newspaper, where it would continue to be published on a weekly basis, with the final edition published the week before Brown's death. As explained in the thesis, many of the later articles have been selected and collected in four separate volumes: *LfH* (1975), *UBB* (1979), *Rockpools and Daffodils* (1992) and *The First Wash of Spring* (2006). None of the articles in this list are included in any of these collections.

In addition to the regular features 'Bookshelf' and 'ID', this list includes other pieces of Brown's journalism, some of which are attributed to him, while some are anonymous. In 1987, Brown reflected on his time working for *The OH*:

³³³ The 'Bookshelf' feature is typical of the freedom that *The OH* seem to give Brown – there does not appear to be a structure of which books to review, and the books he does review are rarely recently published (though some have been re-published). In this weekly feature, Brown reviews a number of books, sometimes as many as three per week. In 1945, Brown engages with a number of 'Penguin Classics': *Twixt Land and Sea* (1912) by Joseph Conrad, *Orlando* (1928) by Virginia Woolf and *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* (1849) by Edgar Allan Poe amongst others. In a more local sense, Brown also reviews *The Story and the Fable* (1940) by Edwin Muir and *Magnus Merriman* (1934) by Eric Linklater. Brown's warmth towards these Orcadian writers is immediate. When briefly reviewing a collection of Scottish short stories, Brown is keen to 'pick out for special mention a story by the Orcadian Eric Linklater' while also specifying that 'another story in the volume is by Willa Muir, the wife of our illustrious Edwin Muir'. On other occasions, Brown's 'Bookshelf' article consists of general discussion of writers work, including Tennyson, Wordsworth and Burns. These articles highlight the growing passion that Brown has for literature, and the breadth of reading that he was undertaking at this key stage in his development. G.M.B., 'Bookshelf', 28th August 1945, p.7.

For some years I was Stromness Correspondent for a newspaper only the older folk remember, *The OH*.

It was war-time – in 1944 – and though a great deal was happening in Stromness, with thousands and thousands of soldiers milling around, for the townsfolk themselves it was quiet days. [...] So, what was a Stromness correspondent going to write about? There were always WRI meetings, and monthly debates that brought soldiers and townsfolk together, and church services. Also cinema and variety in the Garrison Theatre.³³⁴

We can therefore assume with reasonable certainty that the ‘Stromness News’ articles appearing during this time were at least partially written by Brown. These have thus been included in the list below.

Pseudonyms were common in the *OH* during the time researched for this list, far from being confined to Brown. The primary reason for this, one assumes, would be for the writer to seek a degree of anonymity in a small island community. This is particularly understandable given the nature of the *OH* at this time: the newspaper regularly includes impassioned debate on big issues, with fierce discussion often extended in the letters section, exemplified in the thesis.

‘Islandman’ is Brown’s most commonly employed pseudonym, is one that he used for the rest of his career, and is one that we can attribute to him without any degree of doubt.³³⁵ Furthermore, there are a number of anonymous ‘Opinion’ articles that sporadically appear. These articles have significant hallmarks of Brown’s style and Brian Murray claims that they are very likely to have been written by him. These are also included but are presented in italics to differentiate them from other pieces where the evidence of Brown’s authorship is more substantial.

Unless specified otherwise, the articles included in this list are explicitly attributed to Brown in the relevant publication. Every piece of writing from this list appeared in the *OH* newspaper.

³³⁴ Brown, *Rockpools and Daffodills*, p.170.

³³⁵ Ferguson, *The Life*, p.74.

Pre-1945

‘The Hills of Hoy at Sunset’ (poem), 14th June 1939, p.2.

‘Stromness News’, Anon., 5th September 1944, p.6.

- 12th September 1944, p.7.

- 19th September 1944, p.5.

- 10th October 1944, p.7.

- 14th November 1944, p.7.

- 21st November 1944, p.10.

‘‘Stromness Teacher, Councilor and Benefactor’, Stromness Correspondent, 26th September 1944, p.5.

‘Whar’s Thir Scorries?’, Stromness Correspondent, 24th October 1944, p.7.

‘The Downward Trend of the Tory Party’, 28th November 1944, p.6

‘The Orkney Blast’, Stromness Correspondent, 28th November 1944, p.2.

‘The Stromness Gas Question: Another Point of View’, Stromness Correspondent, 19th December 1944 p.5.

‘Tragic Death’, Stromness Correspondent, 19th December 1944 p.5.

‘War Memorial Scheme: What Stromness Thinks’, Stromness Correspondent, 19th December 1944 p.5.

1945

‘New Year Opinions’, Stromness Correspondent, 2nd January 1945, p.5.

‘Stromness Through the Centuries’, 2nd January 1945, p.5.

‘The Crack of Doom’ (poem), 6th January 1945, p.5.

‘The Orkney Book’: A New Estimate’, 9th January 1945, p.5.

‘Stromness News’, Anon., 9th January 1945, p.4.

- 13th February 1945, p.4.

- 13th March 1945, p.4.

- 20th March 1945, p.4.

- 27th March 1945, p.6.

- 8th May 1945, p.4.

- 5th June 1945, p.6.

- 17th July 1945, p.4.

- 24th July 1945, p.4.

- 7th August 1945, p.4.

- 28th August 1945, p.4.

- 11th September 1945, p.4.

- 18th September 1945, p.4.
- 25th September 1945, p.4.
- 2nd October 1945, p.4.
- 20th November 1945, p.6.
- 27th November 1945, p.4.
- 4th December 1945, p.5.
- 11th December 1945, p.4.
- 25th December 1945, p.5.

‘An Orcadian Looks at Robert Burns’, 23rd January 1945, p.5.

‘A Poem of Edwin Muir’, 23rd January, 1945, p.4.

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